

In this World and the Next

Just something that tunnelled through my Occlumency barrier and wouldn't grant me any peace until I wrote it, since I didn't see any point in it just sitting there on my hard drive I'm posting it here. Rating is for first chapter and just to be on the safe side.

Chapter 1

Harry sat alone in Grimmauld Place staring at the small box that held not only a diamond ring within, but his entire future. In the almost eight months since he defeated Voldemort his world had turned upside down, the ring in the box was destined for the only constant in his life since he was eleven years old.

He now understood discovering Hermione that fateful morning after the battle, crying outside the castle was the pivotal event that changed his life, at the time he wanted nothing more than to go and rip the lungs out of the prat responsible for his best friend being out here. She begged him not to but if he'd seen the bruises before they got on that plane to Australia, no force on this Earth could have kept him from extracting revenge on Ronald Fucking Weasley.

The bastard's sister went mental when Harry told her he was leaving with Hermione to find her parents, Ginny had the audacity to give him an ultimatum, that if he left then it was over between them. For some reason Harry found that an incredibly easy decision to make and reminded the girl they'd been 'over' since Dumbledore's funeral.

It was on the plane as Hermione began to fret whether her parents would forgive her that he decided she needed a hug, when she winced as he put his arm around her Harry wanted answers and got the full story. Ron had read a lot more into that kiss than Hermione had intended, when he tried for more kisses later on he didn't take it too well when she told him no. Even the thought of Ron hitting Hermione drove Harry nuts.

Hermione had then found herself trying to comfort him, a jumbo jet cruising at fifty thousand feet is probably the worst place anyone could have a bout of accidental magic, since losing that horcrux from

behind his scar, Harry's control had been all over the place and particularly when he was upset.

She'd held Harry in her arms and spoke softly to him, telling him that she never wanted to see the red headed bastard again, he'd replied that he would not be getting back together with Ginny which enticed Hermione to hug him tighter.

The entire flight they didn't speak about their past – too raw and painful, neither did they speak about their future – too uncertain and totally dependent on the task in hand. The only subject was Hermione's parents and how they would go about finding them.

Hermione had money in the bank she could access, Harry's status with Gringotts was currently unknown so she was taking care of everything, he was happy to turn himself over to her very capable hands.

On arrival they were exhausted and Hermione booked them into the nearest hotel, after staying so long together in that tent, sharing a room felt so natural. When Hermione woke crying, Harry didn't hesitate to hold her until she fell back to sleep. Waking with Hermione in his arms was something he was getting used to, after the first five nights of finishing up in his bed she began ordering double rooms as they travelled around Australia.

The stress and strain was really starting to pile up on Hermione as each lead they chased down ended fruitless, after three weeks of nothing they weren't expecting much but finally struck gold. Unfortunately the gold rapidly lost its lustre as her mum went ape shit when Hermione restored her memory, she ordered them out the house never to return. Harry had to practically carry a distraught Hermione out of there, he led her up a side alley before attempting side-along apparition into their hotel room.

For two days Harry looked after her, if he didn't feed Hermione she didn't eat, her whole world had come crashing down at the thought of her parents hating her. On the third day Hermione's father phoned, Harry had left a hotel card on the table as he helped their daughter

comply with her mother's wishes and finally, here was the contact he was hoping for.

They were invited tonight at six for dinner and discussions, Hermione was a nervous wreck but to be fair, her parents didn't appear much better. The meal was instantly forgotten as her mother stared straight into Hermione's eyes and demanded, "I need to know why our daughter could do something so vile as to make her own parents forget all about her, please explain that as no one leaves this table until I understand what was behind this."

Harry placed his hand on a crying Hermione's arm and accepted responsibility, "That would be my fault ma'am."

Hermione tried to refute that but Harry held her hand and spoke softly to her, "Hermione let me tell the story and we can argue about the blame later, your parents deserve the truth and you're in no state to tell it tonight."

She squeezed his hand so Harry began, he told the story of Voldemort, death eaters and horcruxes, crazy headmasters who could never just tell you something but had to send you on a quest to work things out yourself, the bigotry and violence, torture and murder, it was not a pleasant evening.

"Hermione sent you away for your safety, you would definitely have been targeted as they scoured the country searching for us. Everyone knows the name of my best friend and that she would stick by me no matter what, when we were captured and she was being tortured I nearly went out of my mind, a friend of ours died that night helping us escape." Harry stared at the two elder Grangers as he drove home his point, "Had you stayed in Britain the best we could have offered you would have been moving from safe house to safe house, and some of them didn't turn out to be that safe."

"What happened to the people that tortured my daughter?" her father demanded angrily.

"Well Lestrage is dead but the Malfoys have used their money to get them out of trouble before so we don't know on that score. When the

final battle was over Hermione immediately made plans for us to come and find you, we booked the first available flight the day after the battle and have been out of circulation for about a month now.”

Hermione added her tuppence worth, “Mum, dad, it was my fight but you were caught right in the middle of it, unaware and unprepared. I knew there was a good chance you would never speak to me again but I would rather have that than be laying flowers on your graves because I truly believe that was the alternative.”

“Mr and Mrs Granger, if there’s one thing I’ve learned it’s that your daughter is very rarely wrong, in this case I agree. You may have been kept alive as bait to capture us but that would have left you wishing for death.”

Hermione’s father had a thoughtful expression on his face, “You have given us a lot to talk over, could we do this again tomorrow and we might actually get to eat some food,” both quickly agreed but he wasn’t quite finished yet, “Harry if I ask you an honest question, will you give me an honest answer?”

“I promise I will sir.”

“Can I ask what your relationship is with my daughter?”

Harry noticed he’d been holding her hand all night so was brutally honest, “Hermione has been my best friend for seven years, when we wake in each others arms it’s because one of us has had a horrendous nightmare that only the other can understand. We’ve stood by each other through everything that life’s thrown at us but neither has looked any further than finding you both. I know I never expected to survive the final battle and suspect Hermione thought the same, at some point we’ll sit down and discuss our futures but whatever mine is, your daughter will be part of it somehow.”

Hermione laid her head on his shoulder, “I feel exactly the same way and look forward to that discussion, neither of us is ready for it yet but I think we will be soon.”

The healing process had begun and they had been visiting her parents every evening for five days when Hermione approached him, "Mum has offered their spare room to save us living in the hotel," before Harry could say anything she had countered his argument, "Mum and dad know we're sleeping together, they also know it's just sleeping and don't have a problem with it."

Slowly but surely Harry got to see how a real family operated and it was nothing like the Dursley or Weasley models he was familiar with, this was something he felt a part of, just simple things like helping Hermione make dinner for her parents coming home made him incredibly happy.

It was a few weeks later when Hermione said she was going away for a couple of days with her mum, Harry didn't ask too many questions as he could see how important this was to her. Sitting having a beer with her dad after the Granger girls had left, he found himself answering strange questions.

"Tell me about this Weasley boy?"

"We thought he was our friend but then he hurt Hermione, I wanted to go after him but she was afraid because of my magic being unstable, I could have finished up killing him. I didn't learn about the bruises until we were on the plane or nothing would have stopped me. I haven't forgotten and will be raising the matter next time we meet, nobody hurts Hermione and gets away with it. My magic is back under control but changed so much I rarely need my wand anymore." Harry summoned another couple of beers from the fridge just by lifting his hand, her father took one without seeming to notice the feat.

His eyes stared into the distance as he spoke, "Harry a father only wants what's best for his daughter and I think we both know who that is, please take care of my girl for me because apparently I can't." With that he rose and headed off to his bedroom, leaving Harry sitting wondering just what was going on.

When the girls returned Hermione clung to him like a security blanket and cried in his arms the entire night, Harry just held her and

provided as much comfort as possible, not knowing what was going on but trusting she would tell him eventually.

Weeks turned in to months before they decided to return to Britain for Christmas, no mention was made of 'home' since they hadn't decided where that would be yet, one day back and they had all decided it wouldn't be here, or should that be one issue of the Daily Prophet.

Both Harry and Hermione were aware the magical world was corrupt but this had reached new lows, from what they could gather Kingsley was denied being minister when some archaic law was wheeled out stating that the holder had to be British and a pureblood, since he was neither Deloris Umbridge somehow weaselled her way into the job. The Malfoy's had not only escaped a stay in Azkaban but were back in the society pages as pillars of the community. The biggest shock though was the Weasleys, Ron and Molly were being hailed as the Hero's of Hogwarts for their part in defeating the forces of the evil half-blood who'd deceived the country' pureblood elite. Harry and Hermione had fought and won the bloody war for the Weasleys to claim the credit with the bigotry issue appearing worse than ever.

Thus Harry found himself on Christmas Eve in his godfather's old house praying to every deity that Hermione would accept his proposal, after getting his business sorted at Gringotts and retrieving the ring from his vaults he needed somewhere quiet to compose himself. The stares he was receiving in Diagon Alley were unnerving; it was as if people could not make their own minds up and were waiting to be told what to think of him, he also wanted the portkey to the private Black Island off the coast of Bermuda. If she said yes his plan was for the whole family to visit there, if she said no he needed a private place to quietly drown himself.

The silence was shattered by the shrill of his mobile's ringtone and his heart sank as a distraught Dan's voice had Harry apparating before her father finished speaking, "Harry, the red headed bastard was here and he's got Hermione!"

Harry appeared in the living room to find both Dan and Emma on the floor, they'd had the body bind spell applied on them but Ron was such a shit wizard Dan had been able to fight it and crawl to the

phone. One wave of his hand and they were both free and trying to shout at the same time, the fury Harry felt coursing through his body was at odds with his calm exterior. He held up his hand for silence before saying, "Dan tell me what happened but make it quick."

"He just appeared in the middle of the room and started firing spells before Hermione could even reach for her wand, he said she was his as he'd claimed her and then he took her away, that was about seven or eight minutes ago."

Emma interrupted, "Harry there's something you need to know, he raped Hermione that night, she didn't want to tell you in case you ended up in prison like they did with your godfather, she knew you would kill him."

Things started to make sense for Harry now, "That's why you went away for those few days?"

"Please don't think any less of my girl Harry, you're all she has!"

Harry took the ring box out his pocket to show to a sobbing Emma, "This is hers, if she'll have me."

Dan was nodding his head in agreement, "Bring her home Harry, that's all I ask son."

Harry placed a pendant necklace on the table, "If anything happens, both of you hold this and say 'Orion', it will take you somewhere safe and the elves there will look after you," he picked up Hermione's wand from the floor and concentrated on the woman he loved, Dan and Emma watched as Harry disappeared from their home.

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Ron Weasley looked down at the battered and bleeding form lying on the floor, it was time to show this muggle born bitch her place in society, and who the Hero of Hogwarts really was. He fingered the scratches on his face and reminded himself to make sure she paid for them later on, he was disrobing when the wards around his flat were

blown apart and an enraged Harry Potter stood there watching a frozen Ron in the act of removing his underpants.

He wasn't sure if the screams currently in his mind were actually reaching his mouth as Ronald Bilius Weasley died in agony, his innards blasted all over his flat. In a parody of a Hogwarts ghost, Ron was nearly halved-in-two with only some skin on his left-hand side preventing total separation.

Harry knelt beside Hermione and gently moved her head onto his lap, summoning a blanket from the bed as he did so, she knew he was there and tried to speak, "I'm sorry Harry, he was too strong for me again."

Harry was tucking the blanket around her as he spoke, "Quiet love, he'll never lay a finger on you again."

"Please don't look at me Harry, I need to tell you something..."

"I already know love and it makes no difference to me, this isn't how I planned to ask you but I want you to be my wife, to love you always in this life and the next, Hermione will you marry me?"

"Harry I love you with all my heart but are you sure you want to marry me?"

"There is only one woman for me and she's with me now," Harry slipped the ring on her finger.

"I'll love you forever Harry, in this world and the next."

He leaned over and very gently kissed her bruised and bleeding lips just as four aurors apparated into the flat with wands drawn.

The wards being destroyed followed by the massive power surge seconds later triggered the alarms in the ministry, "Stay where you are and let me see those hands, they better not have a wand in them!"

Harry's eyes flashed with anger as he rose to his feet with Hermione cradled in his arms, his voice brooked no argument. "You know who I am so I suggest lowering those wands before I'm forced to take them from you. I shall be taking my fiancée to St Mungo's for treatment and will answer any questions after that, unlike the piece of shit laying there I neither run away nor attack women."

The four aurors lowered their wands, the newspaper could print what it liked but they knew who had defeated the dark lord and one glance at the tableau in front of them told the story here. "Very well sir, two of us shall accompany you there to assist with the rapid treatment of your lady."

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Harry apparated into the hospital and the accompanying aurors made sure they were promptly dealt with, it was about thirty minutes later, and only after being assured by the healer that Hermione was going to be fine, Harry took the opportunity to phone her parents. Harry was sitting at Hermione's bedside holding her hand, having refused to leave her side since they got there. Dan answered the call after one ring, "She's safe Dan, I got there in time and the bastard will never trouble anyone again. We're at the hospital where she's just been checked and her bruises healed, oh and I asked her the question and she said yes!"

Emma then wanted to talk with Hermione but minutes later all the happiness left the room as the toad marched in with a squad of aurors, oh how Harry hated that voice, "Harry Potter you are under arrest for the murder of the Hero of Hogwarts, Ronald Weasley."

"What about the fact that he was about to rape my fiancée?"

The smirk on her face warned them both that this would be bad news, neither was prepared for just how bad it was, "The law states that it is impossible for a pureblood to rape a muggle born or half blood, the girls should be delighted to receive the attention of such noble wizards."

This shocked Harry so much that the aurors had hold of him and slapped magic inhibiting bracelets on his wrists before he could react.

“When the hell did laws like that come into effect and why haven’t they been published?”

“Ah Miss Granger but they have been published and in effect since September, along with the law making it a criminal offence to terminate any resulting pregnancies from these occurrences. The healer has informed us that you have undergone such a termination and the Weasley family have demanded the full force of the law be brought to bear, you are also under arrest.”

Hermione was also slapped in bracelets before the real bombshell was dropped, “A special session of the Wizengamot has been convened and you will stand trial immediately, we should be able to get this entire mess dealt with before the holidays.”

Back in Crawley two parents listened to the phone, helpless as their daughter and future son-in-law were effectively just sentenced to death. Emma was in pieces as Dan reached for the necklace.

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They soon came to realise what the toad meant by ‘special session’, it was a panel of five people but considering that the toad, Lucius Malfoy and Percy Weasley were three of the members, both knew they were doomed. The fact that there was a dementor already there to administer the sentence was also a large clue. The only other people present were the rest of the Weasley family who were out for blood, Molly appeared ready to collect it personally and as painfully as possible, Arthur had to hit his wife with a silencing charm as she ranted like a lunatic.

The sham began with Hermione being questioned, “Miss Granger you are charged with terminating a child of one Mr Ronald Weasley, how do you plead?”

“Would it make any difference if I pointed out the bastard raped me, which was against the law then, the termination was carried out in

another country and on a timescale that broke no British laws at the time of the event?"

The answer from toad of, "Mere technicalities!" left both aware this was their last hour on this Earth.

"I plead guilty then and my only regret is that it wasn't me who killed the bastard!"

"Mr Potter, you are charged with the murder of Mr Ronald Weasley, how do you plead?"

"We both know it doesn't matter what I say so let's just end any pretence that this travesty is in any way just and legal process, he was about to rape my fiancée so I killed the piece of filth, you can and will interpret that any way you wish."

"Let the records state that Mr Potter admitted his guilt but showed no remorse, since both have pled guilty it falls to me to deliver sentence, you will both receive a dementor's kiss immediately." The smirk on the bitch's face was not a pretty sight though Harry did spoil her moment somewhat.

"Oh look Hermione, they just happen to have one here. And there was us thinking that the magical government couldn't organise a piss-up in a brewery!"

Umbridge was not amused, "For that vote of confidence Mr Potter you can have the pleasure of watching justice being administered to your fiancée."

Two aurors tried to help Hermione stand but she shrugged them off and went straight to Harry, "Remember Harry I'll love you forever, in this world and the next, I'll be waiting for you love." She then kissed him with every fibre of her being before turning to face an enraged Weasley family, "Your son was a piece of shit who ran away when the going got tough, the Hero of Hogwarts died screaming like the coward he was. We'll show you who the real Hero's of Hogwarts were." She marched straight up to the dementor, "C'mon big guy, I've been kissed by Ron Weasley so this should actually seem pleasant!"

She never flinched once as the foul creature sucked out her soul, no one had ever seen anything like it though the smell of burning flesh was also unusual, that was until an auror noticed the bracelets Harry wore were glowing red hot with the amount of magic they were forced to adsorb, burning cruelly and deeply into his wrists. As the spark of life left Hermione's eyes the bracelets began to cool, there was nothing left to fight for now.

"Well Mr Potter it would appear that you have a rather pressing appointment."

One glance from Harry and the aurors backed away, he stood unaided before making a proclamation, "I swear to have my revenge on the Malfoy's, Weasley's and especially you toadface for what you just did to Hermione, in this or any other world, I'll be waiting on you."

Malfoy's sneer would have made Snape jealous, "Well boy while you're waiting we shall be enjoying ourselves by spending the Potter and Black fortunes."

Harry didn't bother to tell them that he'd completed a will today at Gringotts, with Hermione gone his godson Teddy Lupin inherited everything. It had already been transferred to the Australian branch of Gringotts and Teddy would be looked after by his trust fund until he was seventeen, the entire fortune would then be his. The Grangers would be safe on Black Island while the goblins would lock everything else down until Teddy was of age to inherit.

Harry walked up to the soulless husk of his Hermione and held her hand, "Be with you soon love," as the dementor sucked out its second soul of the day.

The self-satisfied smiles of the chamber's occupants were soon wiped out as the dementor exploded with a magical backlash that saw fixtures, fittings and bodies thrown about everywhere.

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Harry felt no pain, if this was death it was overrated! He felt a presence near him, a presence that he knew almost as well as his own and then his Hermione was there with him. Their love had crossed the boundaries and now they would be together forever, the swell of happiness generated by both of them was enormous as their souls joined in a way far more intimate than any sexual act. The power proved too much for the vessel they were contained in and then they were gone, she was gone as he drifted alone with no external stimuli whatsoever.

It could have been minutes or years but the next thing Harry remembered he 'awoke' in a place instantly recognisable as Kings Cross Station but there was no Dumbledore waiting on him this time. This was no dream but actual reality, he was standing there with a trolley containing his beloved Hedwig staring at him from inside her cage on top of his trunk.

While attempting to figure out just what the hell was going on he heard a well-known voice, the last time he'd heard it she was shouting that the murdering bastard and his whore should get what was coming to them, '-packed with muggles of course-' Molly Weasley could never have been accused of being quiet so anyone within a ten-yard radius must have heard that comment.

"Now what's that platform number?" She attended the school for seven years and had been sending her children there for the last nine, how could she possibly forget the platform number? Was his whole 'meeting the Weasleys' saga a set up? One thing was for sure, Harry wanted nothing to do with them this time, turning his back while trying to figure out how he got to be standing here on the first of September in Nineteen Ninety-One.

"Nine and three-quarters!" piped Ginny, Harry had noticed the look of revenge on her face as Hermione met her end, he wasn't about to forget it. More hints were dropped, each louder and more direct than the last until Harry felt a hand on his arm.

"Hello dear," Molly said, "First time at Hogwarts? Ron's new too!"

What Harry really wanted to do was start firing curses but in the middle of Kings Cross that was not perhaps the best idea, he just got another thought. "Ma'am I don't know you and have no idea what you're talking about."

"Oh nonsense dear, we'll soon have you fixed out, Fred, George, help with this trolley, just you come with me."

As he knew she would Molly started dragging him towards the portal, taking a deep breath he shouted at the top of his voice, "Help me, someone help me, this woman is trying to take me away!"

Muggles may not be able to apparate but they move pretty fast when a child is in danger, Kings Cross on a Sunday was still a very busy station and people pounced on Molly from every direction. The twins and Percy got involved but were soon restrained as well, Ron met with an unfortunate accident in the shape of Harry's elbow to his jaw as he was running past while Ginny just stood there, looking on in bewilderment and total horror.

A kindly lady was asking Harry where his parents were, he told her they were dead and he was off to visit a great-aunt, a wandless 'notice me not' charm and he was able to make good his escape. He really didn't want to go anywhere near Hogwarts but Hermione was on that train, he would march through the gates of Hell to save her but it was going to be extremely difficult pretending he didn't know his fiancée, Harry was certain he wasn't that good of an actor.

Harry released Hedwig to fly to the castle, used his wandless magic to shrink her cage and his trunk before racing for the barrier and the girl on the train.

Harry boarded as the train was about to leave, he was just about to start searching for Hermione when she appeared, pulling her heavy trunk along the passageway. Seeing her and this age again totally floored him, she looked up and brown eyes met green, for a second Harry would have sworn he saw recognition there. Then again he was the boy-who-lived and Hermione had been reading about him, perhaps that was it, "Can I give you a hand with that?"

Hermione was lost for words, not something Harry was used to but when he reached down to assist with that weighty trunk it was his turn for silence, on her finger was the diamond ring he himself had placed there.

Harry rubbed his fingers over the diamond to confirm it wasn't just his eyes playing tricks on him, "Hermione, my Hermione?"

"In this world and the next, is that really you Harry?"

"I'm the same Harry who put that ring on your finger but how is this possible?"

Hermione shook her head, "I really don't give a shit!" as she sprang into his arms and kissed him like there was no tomorrow, her actions finally convinced Harry that this was real, or both of them in the same dream was as good as real to make no difference.

Harry shrunk her trunk and slipped it in her pocket as they made their way along the passageway looking for an empty compartment, the conversation they were about to have was not one they wanted overheard.

On finally finding one, the door was charmed not to open as Harry pulled Hermione onto his knee, both needing the physical contact to remind them that this was in fact real. "I was trying to get off the train Harry when I noticed you weren't on it, there are no Weasleys on board either."

"Yes well I figured out that the whole introduction to the red menace was planned on some level, when I didn't take the bait mother Molly grabbed my arm and started dragging me away. I screamed blue murder that I was being abducted and the last I saw of them they were being handcuffed by the police! All except Ron that is, I heard the first aider say I might have broken his jaw, not a bad beginning but things will get much worse for them if I have anything to do with it."

Hermione buried her head in his shoulder and he could feel her tears through his shirt, "I'm sorry Harry, without my wand Ron was just too strong for me to deal with."

Harry held her tight, "Hermione you have nothing to apologise for, you did nothing to encourage him and I don't believe that crap anyway. One kiss from a friend doesn't give him the right to attack your body, no always means no and I don't want to be part of any society that thinks otherwise."

"Thank you Harry for understanding, I couldn't believe he would do something like that and by the time I realised his intentions he had my wand. I think my brain actually shut down for a while because the next thing I remember I was alone and desperate to get away. You have no idea how much it meant when you offered to come to Australia with me, it's always been you Harry, I just didn't think I stood a chance."

"You always came first Hermione, whether it was Cho or Ginny, I always put you first, I was just too stupid to realise what it meant. The Ron incident hasn't happened yet and there's no chance it ever will, the possibility of us being friends with him this time doesn't exist and if he comes anywhere near my girl, the bastard won't know what hit him! I've not only retained all my knowledge from last time but power as well, my ability to perform wandless magic is also available, meaning my scar might be just a scar, I'll know for certain at the feast tonight if it doesn't react to Quirrell."

"Aw shit Harry, does this mean I'm going to have to learn to play chess? I hate that bloody game!"

"We have the knowledge to change things so that's what I intend to do, fuck preserving the time line that saw you raped and the two of us kissed before we got out our teens. I really don't care about anyone else, as long as the four of us are safe, though explaining that ring to your dad might require Hagrid as a bodyguard."

"Don't even consider me taking this off because that is never going to be an option, I don't know how it got here but then I don't know how

we got here so why should a ring be any less impossible? You know my mum and dad love you, well at least they did before.”

“Before we were both eighteen, not eleven! Your dad will probably only half-kill me before passing me over to your mum to finish the job.”

“I’ll be twelve in less than three weeks.”

“Oh good, that will make all the difference, let’s wait and tell him then!”

Hermione giggled as she snuggled in to Harry, both understood that they needed to figure out not only how they got here but what to do about a multitude of problems. At the moment that could all wait, reassuring each other that they were in fact alive, together, and on the Hogwarts Express as first years was way more important. There would be plenty of time to do research once they reached Hogwarts, considering they had passed their OWL’s in most subjects and would be doing first year work.

A/N Thanks for reading.

I will only be updating this sporadically when I hit a brick wall with my other stories, my plan is to finish both of them first before switching my attention to this though ‘the best laid schemes o’ Mice an’ Men’ ... (Robert Burns ‘To a Mouse’)

Chapter 2

The time they spent snuggling and comforting one another was enjoyable and provided them with much needed reassurance, but they were rudely returned to their current reality by a ferret trying to gain access to their compartment.

Harry tensed ready for battle but Hermione's kisses drove all other thoughts from his mind, when she decided to come up for air the ferret and his handlers were long gone.

"It's time to start figuring what we want to achieve here love, if you want to walk into Hogwarts, tell Dumbledore to go screw himself and come straight home with me then I'll be right by your side, but I think we have to decide now."

Her kisses this time were a lot softer, "I know you inside-out Harry Potter, you have scars on your soul that we have been given a chance to heal. Sirius is alive, as is Cedric, Remus, Tonks, her father and many more, we can make sure they all stay that way."

Harry held her tight, "I'm sorry love but I can't go through those seven years again, Ron is a dead man walking and nothing you can say will change that. Umbridge, Malfoy and Percy were on the panel that ordered that dementor to feed on you while Molly was the driving force behind the charges, there can be no mercy for them either."

"I don't think they deserve any, they didn't show much in the way of mercy to us! All I'm saying is we need to set some goals' and those will do for starters, are we going to take down Voldemort?"

"There is no way I could leave you and stand there while the bastard hits me with an Arvada Kedavra, that's just not happening. We could destroy the horcruxes and keep our options open, the day I gave you that ring I was intending for the four of us to disappear to the Black island off the coast of Bermuda, that still sounds appealing to me, let the rest of them drown in the ocean of shit entirely of their own making."

“That sounds wonderful to me as well but at this point in time we don’t have access to Black island, unless we get Sirius out of Azkaban. The reason I stopped you from attacking Malfoy is that his father has the diary, we know what he’s eventually going to do with it but not until next summer. We could just ambush them that day in Diagon Alley and take the bloody thing, I have no wish to be petrified or see you fighting that bloody Basilisk to save a Weasley.”

“I see what you mean love, me slaughtering the ferret on the train might lose us the diary, though I’m wondering if that might not be a fair exchange?”

“You’ll get no argument from me, it all depends on our goals’ Harry, if we’re going to let Voldemort take over the country then we can throw Malfoy off the astronomy tower tonight.”

“I can’t make up my mind whether to feed Ron to Fluffy or lock him in the bathroom with the troll, he and Myrtle keeping each other company in a toilet u-bend for the next millennium sounds like a just punishment to me.”

“Why settle for just the one, couldn’t we let the troll work him over and then feed the leftovers to Fluffy? I think we need to decide on Voldemort and everything else will follow from there, we also have to be careful not to appear too knowledgeable and try to stay out of the spotlight, though I understand that will be difficult for the boy who lived!”

Harry kissed her again, “Well my new philosophy is pretty simple, I trust no one but you and that’s the way it’s going to stay, we’re not two naïve kids this time and anyone treating us as such is in for a rude awakening. Let’s just keep an eye on how the ‘adults’ react around us and see if we can spot whose playing games. Our biggest problem may be that I don’t think I can survive without you to cuddle into every night, you Miss Granger are addictive and I can safely say I’m hooked!” This ended any conversation as Hermione showed her appreciation of that comment, after all the man of her dreams had asked her to marry him and she was focusing on that to blot out the earlier incident.

The only time their door was opened the entire trip was to buy sweets from the trolley lady, Harry had just left the Dursleys and as usual was famished. The occupants of the train appeared more concerned with the nonappearance of any Weasleys than the two first years who sat cuddling each other the entire journey.

Leaving the train to the familiar sound of Hagrid calling for the first years tugged on their heart strings, it was one thing to talk about letting Voldemort take over Britain, seeing Neville standing alone, to shy to ask anyone about sharing a boat, was a whole different matter.

Both headed straight for him, "Hi there, want to share a boat with us?" Hermione asked.

Neville seemed more relieved than anything else and muttered 'sure' before the three of them sat in the little craft and began chatting as it slowly took them to their new life. "I'm Hermione and this is Harry, we're new at this magic malarkey and, although we've both done lots of reading, we're hoping that someone can take us under their wing and help us out."

This was more than anyone had said to Neville since his Grandmother put him on the train, "I'm Neville, are you both muggle born?"

"Hermione is and I might as well be, didn't know about magic until my eleventh birthday. Have you grown up with it or are you just like us?"

"No I come from a magical family though they weren't sure if I was going to be magical, to be honest I'm still not convinced I should be here."

The insecurities and lack of any self-esteem were plainly visible in his body language, it was hard to believe this was the same boy who would charge at Voldemort and destroy the final horcrux, "We've heard stories about these houses Neville, which one do you think fit's you?"

“I’ll just be happy if any of them take me.”

“Oh you’re a definite Gryffindor!” the boy’s eyes nearly popped out his head at Hermione’s declaration, “You don’t think you shouldn’t be here yet you’re still going ahead, that says Gryffindor courage to me.”

“My Grandmother put me on the train and I was too scared to get back off!”

Harry placed his hand on the frightened boy’s shoulder, “Neville if you stride up to that stool, place the sorting hat on your head and demand to be in Gryffindor the hat will be forced to place you there, that’s true Gryffindor courage.”

They could see him thinking about it as he kept the conversation going, “What houses are you hoping for?”

They looked towards each other, only now were the implications beginning to dawn on them, place Harry, Ron and Peter Pettigrew in the same dorm and there would be at least one murder done. “We’re not sure Neville, I think we’re both sneaky enough for Slytherin while loyal as any Hufflepuff.”

“Hermione here is scarily brilliant and would fit right into Ravenclaw.”

“While Harry here is Gryffindor enough to stick his wand up a troll’s nose while saving a friend. One thing’s for sure, we’ll be in the same house or we’ll be home for supper!” Neville had never heard anyone speak with such confidence in his life.

Harry had his arm around her shoulders to show his agreement about them being together, Neville had to ask, “Are you a couple?”

Harry’s smile was a beacon on the dark water, “Hermione is my best friend and my girlfriend.” She placed her hand on Harry’s cheek and Neville’s reaction almost overturned their boat.

“I thought you said you were muggles, where did you get that?” indicating Hermione’s ring.

“Harry gave it to me, I think it’s beautiful.”

Neville couldn’t take his eyes off it, “Oh it’s beautiful, it’s also an old family wedding ring, when the head of an old family places that ring on a girl’s finger and she accepts it, that couple are then married!”

Harry shook his head, “See Neville that’s why we need you around, I give my girl a ring and now this lovely lady’s my wife, you help us with this magical stuff and we’ll give you a hand with lessons and homework.”

Neville was trying to understand this couple but had nothing to compare them with, perhaps there was nothing to compare them with? “For this marriage to be binding you would have to be the head of an old family and Hermione would need to want to marry you, this is crazy as you’re both eleven!”

“Neville my name is Harry Potter and this lovely young lady has been my best friend for years, I can’t think of anything that would please me more than having her as Hermione Potter. I found this ring in my vault and immediately thought of Miss Granger here so maybe you can understand why we’re not upset about this.”

“You’re Harry Potter? Malfoy was all over the train looking for you!”

“It’s just Harry Neville, is Malfoy the little blond git?”

“Eh Harry, if this is true then there might be a bit of a commotion when they read the names out in the great hall, Mr and Mrs Potter could bring the roof down.”

All chat stopped as Hogwarts came into view, Harry and Hermione may have spent six years living in the castle but the view was still spectacular enough to take your breath away.

They were out the boats and McGonagall had just given them her 'your house is your family speech' when Malfoy made his move, she had hardly left the entrance hall when the blond shoved Neville out his way and stuck his manicured hand out to Harry, "My name is Malfoy, Draco Malfoy. You'll soon find out some wizarding families are much better than others, Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort, I can help you there!"

Harry glanced at the offered hand and tried to hold his temper, "Where did you get the idea that I would need an arrogant little albino prick like you as my social secretary? You throw the name Malfoy around like it's supposed to mean something well I tell you what it means to me, your father didn't have the guts or conviction to stand up for his beliefs and used his money to help lie his way out of a prison sentence. Your aunt is a psychopath who's currently rotting her arse off in Azkaban and you have the audacity to stand there and propose to tell me which wizarding families are better than others? Why don't you take dumb and dumber here and run crying to daddy!"

Draco was incensed, didn't Potter know who he was? "Potter when my father hears of this..."

Harry was right in Draco's face, "He will do the exact same as his son and wet himself, I dealt with his master when I was a baby so why do you think I would be afraid of the servant now?"

Draco tried to return Harry's stare but the whine in his voice told all the first years who was winning this contest, "The Malfoy's are nobody's servants."

"You keep telling yourself that while everyone else can imagine your father down on his knees kissing the hem of Voldemort's robes."

The screams from Harry saying the name were covered by the appearance of the Hogwarts ghosts, McGonagall returned before Malfoy could conjure a witty reply so he sulked away muttering threats of retribution.

Harry grabbed Neville and pulled him back to his side, "Don't let that arsehole push you around Neville, you're worth twelve of Malfoy."

Minerva was about to reprimand the boy for his use of language until she realised what he was doing and decided not to hear the remark, it would appear that Mr Potter had already made a friend and the way Augusta coddled Neville this might be the making of the lad. She led the new first years into the great hall to be sorted.

Harry and Hermione were too busy wondering how long it would take the red heads to get here that the sorting hat had finished its song and Hannah Abbot was heading to the Hufflepuff table before they knew what was happening.

When McGonagall called for Daphne Greengrass and Hermione was still standing there, the couple understood that any attempt at staying out of the spotlight was now about as likely as Umbridge making a nude calendar. Harry knew the magical world had its quirks and foibles but couldn't imagine there would be much demand for an 'amorous amphibians' publication.

"Neville things are about to get very messy, just remember you're our first magical friend and don't worry about any shit that happens around us. We can take care of ourselves, and our friends."

When his name was called and still no mention of Granger, Neville understood what Harry was saying, this revelation would be the talk of the castle, no the whole of magical Britain would go berserk at the news the-boy-who-lived was married, and to a muggle born to boot!

Neville squared his shoulders, "I'll keep you guys seats at the Gryffindor table!" he marched up to the stool and the sorting hat was on his head for less than thirty seconds before it shouted "Gryffindor!" His beaming smile towards Harry and Hermione let them know they had just made a friend for life.

Minerva had been staring at the next entry on her list wishing she didn't have to read it out loud, her gaze shifted to the two children who were standing holding hands and wished there was something that could be done to avoid the maelstrom that was about to descend upon them. She hoped Albus choked on his infernal lemon drops for

forcing Harry to grow up outside their world, “Mr and Mrs Harry Potter!”

Minerva didn't think the dark lord turning up in a tutu could have drawn anymore attention than the young couple walking hand in hand towards her, they squeezed together on the stool as the hat expanded to fit over both their heads.

“Mr and Mrs Potter, let me be the first to offer my congratulations on your recent nuptials and say welcome back!”

“Er, thanks I think, can anyone else hear us?”

“Only the three of us are privy to what is said during your sorting Mr Potter.”

That was good enough for Hermione who had a load of questions needing answered, “You know we came back in time, have you any idea how that happened?”

“A combination of effects Mrs Potter, can you remember what you said to your husband when he placed the Potter ring on your finger?”

“Of course I can, I'm hardly likely to forget that! I said I'll love you forever Harry, in this world and the next.” A semblance of understanding began to percolate at the back of Hermione's mind.

“As usual Mrs Potter you are correct, your husband used similar words when he proposed creating an amazingly strong bond of marriage. When they then used the same dementor for both of you, your souls joined with such force the creature was blasted to pieces, and so I might add were most of the room's occupants.”

“That doesn't explain what we're doing back here though,” said Harry.

They could sense something that felt like sorrow emanating from the ancient magical artifact, “You both gave everything you had to give in the defeat of evil and were then betrayed by a magical community

that didn't deserve you. You are the chosen one Mr Potter but misguided people stopped you reaching your full potential, with this young lady at your side our world could have been dragged into the new millennium. Instead, an event took place that saw you both flee the country and the scum clawed, lied and cheated their way back to the top unopposed, your work was only just beginning with the defeat of Riddle but of course you chose to support the love of your life."

Hermione felt this tattered old piece of cloth was insinuating that this whole mess was her fault, she'd had enough of being pushed around. "Again that doesn't explain why we're back here, could you please just answer the question, we had enough of Dumbledore playing games and not giving us the answers to last us two lifetimes!"

"The powers that be decided to send you back with your memories and powers intact, they understand that you'll be looking to apply some retribution but now see the necessity for that. For our world to survive the stupidity that is blood purity must be abolished, we need a revolution and you two have been elected to be its leaders."

"Shit! I never asked for, nor wanted any of this. Don't we get a choice?"

"Of course you do Mr Potter, but from young Mr Longbottom's demands to be placed in Gryffindor I would say you have already made it. You are both intrinsically good people who will not hesitate to make the difficult choices, giving you back your lives and each other was the least that could be done for you. As Hermione is Mrs Potter, married to the head of the Potter family, that ring would automatically appear on her finger, signifying her unquestionable and unchangeable status to everyone in our world."

Calling her Mrs Potter placated Hermione a little, for now. "Ok that's better than anything we've been able to come up with so far but shouldn't you get on with the sorting, we've been here ages." Hermione could have sworn the hat chuckled.

“Very little time has actually passed, communicating by this method is considerably faster, am I to assume its Gryffindor once again for both of you?”

“Only if you sort Ron Weasley somewhere else,” Harry growled.

“Unfortunately I don’t think I can, he has no loyalty which rules out Hufflepuff, let’s just say his exclusion from Ravenclaw’s a given while he has ambition enough for Slytherin there is no guile there.”

Hermione wasn’t going to stand for that, “Oh he managed to pull the wool over our eyes for all those years, I think he would fit right in there.”

“I could offer you Ravenclaw?”

“With Cho and Marietta, no chance!”

“Hufflepuff?”

Harry was the one who scuppered this choice, “Justin and Ernie are worse than the Creevey brothers, at least I can ignore them.”

“Well then I am rather at a loss...”

“Crawley.”

“I’m sorry Mrs Potter I don’t understand, that’s not a house.”

“Yes but my house is there, I say we get the fuck out of this place tonight and the country by next week. At least we’ll live to see twenty.”

Harry didn’t need the use of language to know that Hermione’s patience had finally snapped, apparently the sorting hat had cottoned on too because it suddenly shouted “Gryffindor married quarters!” before she could carry out her very real threat.

“What about Ron?” Harry asked before the hat could be removed.

“He shall be placed elsewhere.”

Hermione had just enough time to say, “Place Luna in Gryffindor next year” before McGonagall lifted the battered old hat off their heads.

The sorting hat’s confirmation that they were married saw them greeted with total silence as they made their way over to sit beside Neville, as he congratulated his new friends the spell was broken when McGonagall announced the next name to be sorted.

The couple were then bombarded with questions, which they politely ignored in favour of watching the staff’s reaction while chatting to Neville. Harry felt no pain in his head when Quirrell turned around so the chances were good his scar was just that, Snape’s permanent scowl made it difficult to get a read on him while the normally serene Dumbledore appeared as if he’d swallowed a wasp. He had to be nudged when the sorting was over and just signalled for the feast to begin, the old wizard obviously had a lot on his mind.

Harry reckoned he would be paying a visit to the headmaster’s office sooner rather than later, Dumbledore would be disappointed.

They had just finished their meal, Harry trying not to eat too much because his stomach wasn’t used to it, when the headmaster stood and gave his beginning of term announcements. Once again they were reminded that the forbidden forest was in fact just that, and again the third floor corridor was deadly.

They found themselves being escorted by McGonagall in the direction of Gryffindor tower, being a prefect down and having a married couple in her house led to her taking responsibility. Harry wasn’t sure if it was just for a chance to question them prior to Dumbledore’s summons, they were adopting the headmaster’s style of not telling lies but definitely not supplying the entire truth.

“Where did you two meet?”

“We met on our first day of school, we’ve been best friends for years.”

“When did you get married?”

“Today on the train apparently.”

This caused Minerva to do a double take before Harry continued, “We had intended to get married in the future but the ring I gave her means we were married today.”

“How did you get a hold of that ring?”

Harry faked a look of puzzlement, “It’s a Potter family ring, I’m head of the Potter family by being the only one left, why shouldn’t I have my ancestor’s ring to give my girl?”

McGonagall was now the one puzzled, “Mr Potter, where did you hear all this?”

“Our new friend Neville told us, why wasn’t I supposed to know my rights?”

They had reached the Gryffindor portrait hole so she was spared from answering, after telling the Potters the password she led the pair further down the corridor until stopping at a suit of armour standing in a recess. “Charles we have two for the married quarters, you need to set a password that will allow you entry.”

Quick as a flash Hermione offered “Australia!” McGonagall’s quizzical expression prompted an explanation, “My family are considering moving there, Harry and I have already started researching magical schools to decide what part of the country suits us best. Some of them look fantastic and for us a warm Australian beach will beat a drafty old Scottish castle every time.”

‘Charles’ stood aside, revealing a hidden door, they entered what appeared a cosy one bedroom flat with its own large bedroom, sitting

area, bathroom / shower and compact kitchen, they could be quite comfortable here.

Minerva's mind was still on the password though, "Mr Potter would you really move to Australia? Your parents would have wanted you here."

"Professor, my entire life I have been told my parents were no-good lazy drunks who died in a car crash, you saying they would have wanted me to attend here means nothing to me."

McGonagall couldn't believe what she was hearing, "James and Lily Potter were two of the kindest and bravest people I've ever met, they are heroes in our world!"

"Yet their son ended up living in a cupboard, treated no better than a slave. If that's how you treat your hero's professor, then maybe you can understand why Australia appears so attractive an option to us."

Minerva had no answer, she'd told Dumbledore that night he was making a mistake leaving Harry there and now it would appear they could end up paying for it. Harry Potter leaving Hogwarts to attend another school would be a hammer blow to the prestige of Hogwarts and its headmaster. Albus wanted to talk to the boy tonight but she now thought that would be another huge mistake, although they appeared quite open she could sense that their answers were carefully considered before being given, not something she was used to with first year students.

Minerva had been asked by Albus to enquire if Harry had seen the Weasleys, she thought this was a strange request but then Albus wasn't exactly what you would consider normal.

"We seem to be missing a few students, they all have distinctive red hair, did you by any chance spot them in the station?"

"Is their mother a wee fat woman with an extremely loud voice and obnoxious bossy attitude?"

Minerva wasn't sure how to reply to that, "I've never heard her described that way before but it could possibly be, why, did you see them?"

"Well this woman in Kings Cross was shouting about muggles and platform nine and three quarters, she then grabbed me and started to drag me away. In school we're taught how to deal with that, you scream blue murder for help, so that's what I did!"

Minerva was almost afraid to ask, "What happened then?"

"Last I saw of the nutters, they were being led away in handcuffs by the police, I left to get on the train and find Hermione."

This was not how she envisaged her day turning out when she got up this morning, but it wasn't finished yet, Mrs Potter had one last shock for her.

"Professor as our head of house we are required to inform you if we leave the school, according to 'Hogwarts a History' as married couple this is our right. It is our intention to leave after our last class on Friday to spend the weekend with my parents."

Minerva could only nod, "Please give me that in writing after you receive your timetables tomorrow, I know this whole marriage thing must come as a bit of a shock, if there is anything I can help you with please don't be afraid to ask."

Minerva was the one in shock at Hermione's saucy answer, "Professor, this is our wedding night and I think we'll manage fine without any help."

The stern professor was almost blushing as she left them alone, Harry was gobsmacked, "Hermione Jane Potter, what was that all about? You know we're both eleven and that wont be happening for a while yet."

She kissed her husband, "Harry if we want to be taken seriously it starts now, what we do is our business but I intend to remind them we are married at every opportunity. If we behave like children, then that's the way we will be treated, they're certain to start leading us in the direction they want us to go, claiming as adults they know best but we both know they don't."

"Yeah but we're still too young for that, right?"

Hermione's smile was a beautiful thing that Harry didn't think he would ever tire of seeing, "Love I understand we have to grow into our bodies, I even have my big teeth back, but between the tent and our time in Australia we've lived together for about a year and a half so this should be no different. I expect my husband to kiss me goodnight and to wake in his arms every morning, the other stuff will sort itself out with time."

Harry held her closer, "Just remember that even as an eighteen year old I was still clueless, look how long it took me to ask for your hand, please hit me with a beater's bat if you need to draw my attention to something I should be doing. I'm so lucky to have you and never want to disappoint my beautiful wife."

This earned him another kiss, "Mr Potter you're doing just fine, when do you think the red heads will get here?"

"I don't know but you can guarantee they'll be mad, we better be ready for anything."

-oOoOo-

Molly Weasley wasn't mad, she passed mad a long, long time ago, her legendary temper had erupted but the police officers paid it not the slightest notice, with her hands cuffed behind her back and no wand, Molly was powerless to do anything but rant. That rant was the reason she'd spent the rest of the day in a cell, had she been calm and explained the incident away as a misunderstanding, the whole family would have been out of there within the first hour.

Instead, she had screamed like a banshee, promising retribution on all who were involved, and hardened the attitude of the police officers who began to dig deeper and found nothing. They had no records of the entire family, no way to contact this supposed husband who apparently worked in some capacity for the government. Combined with no records of any kind existing for the five minors apparently in her care, this set professional alarm bells ringing in the police station as other agencies were drafted in to assist.

September the first is one of the busiest days on the magical world's calendar so nothing was picked up as being wrong until Albus floo-called Arthur Weasley, this finally set the ministry wheels in motion. The obliviators were kept very busy as all record of Molly Weasley ever being in the police station had to be erased as well as quite a few memories, then it was off to child care services to collect the kids. Even the animals had been taken to a rescue centre but worst of all was Ron, Molly was in tears as she looked on at what these bloody muggle torturers had done to her boy. Harry would be delighted to discover that he had indeed broken Ron's jaw, his mother found him in a hospital bed, recovering from having his jaw surgically wired.

The family looked on in disbelief, did the muggles think Ron was a werewolf or vampire who would bite to treat him this way? Wiping out the hospital records and some more memories was then followed by a trip to St Mungo's to have Ron unwired, the poor boy would have starved to death in a few days!

Thus it was that Molly's fuse was even shorter than normal as she led her brood into Hogwarts next morning, on entering the great hall her eyes immediately scanned the room before locking onto her target. That little shit was going to get a personal howler delivered from a distance of six inches while she held him by the throat, Molly rushed straight at him.

The Potters were sitting eating their breakfast while discussing the timetables McGonagall had just handed them, as the conversation began to die around the pair, Hermione glanced up just as Molly was about to make a grab for Harry.

How she kept that curse to a 'petrificus totalus' she would never know, the temptation to hit the bitch with a 'reducto' was almost overpowering. As it was, a petrified Molly crashed into the table where Harry had just been sitting, face first into his half-eaten porridge.

Percy Weasley was one angry young man, he'd spent the entire time since receiving his badge dreaming of strolling through these hallowed halls proudly displaying to the school that he was a prefect. Instead, he missed the feast, sorting and leading the first year Gryffindors to their new home. Now a first year had just cursed his mother, Percy drew his wand ready to extract some retribution. Unfortunately for Percy Hermione's wand was already in her hand and he found himself in the same predicament as his mother, without the aid of porridge to break his fall.

Harry had moved just as fast as his wife, while petrified Molly was falling past him, Harry's wand was in his hand, he gave the twins time to reach for their wands before casting the same curse as Hermione. He switched his attention to Ron and wasn't sure if the boy was more upset about his mother being cursed or the porridge being wasted, not knowing any magic, he let out a roar and charged at Hermione.

Harry's wand tracked his progress but he really wanted Hermione to deal with this, she did! At first it appeared as if she's choked but when Ron was the correct distance away she exploded into action as her right foot connected with excruciating force and painful accuracy on her attacker's groin.

Ron's forward momentum was stopped from the waist down but his upper body was still going forward, bending him over and giving Hermione the perfect target, with a cry of "BASTARD!" her knee crunched his nose. Ron landed in a groaning heap at Hermione's feet as her wand now pointed at the little sister. "Are you staying out of this or do we need to deal with you as well?"

Ginny was brought along because her dad had to go to work and the girl was excited, she was going to see Hogwarts. Seconds after she had admired the ceiling her family were on the floor and she had the terrifying sight of an enraged brown haired girl pointing her wand at

poor little Ginny Weasley. She could only shake her head as her voice wouldn't work.

Harry had been afraid there for a second that Hermione was going to let Ron reach her, had he laid hands on his wife nothing in this hall would have been able to move quick enough to stop Harry killing him. Hermione was standing just that bit straighter after inflicting some punishment on the prick, she'd obviously decided to deal with him physically as that was what she needed to gain that bit of self-respect back. With a wand in her hand Hermione was always going to make mincemeat of Ron Weasley, in this or any other time, now she knew that physically he wasn't going to defeat her either.

Snape's expression was almost gleeful as he shouted from the Slytherin table, "Twenty points each from Gryffindor and detention every night this week, that also means you lose your privileges for the coming weekend."

McGonagall was also still handing out timetables and it was to her Hermione turned, "Whose he and can he do that?"

"That is Professor Snape, head of Slytherin and I'm afraid he can."

"So this woman and her family attack us and we get punished for defending ourselves?"

McGonagall could only answer, "You should have let a professor deal with the situation."

"I'm sorry professor but I don't trust any of the staff in here to do that, I will not stand back and watch my husband attacked while we wait to see if a member of staff can be bothered to intervenes. Had the action for defence been as quick as the reaction to hand out punishment we would not be having this conversation, you have forced our hand." She turned to Harry, "Do we need anything from the room?"

Harry thought about it, "We've read all the books, won't need parchment, quills or school uniforms again so I would reckon just our jackets. You know you've been dying to try that spell!"

Hermione held up her wand, "Accio Mr and Mrs Potter's jackets."

The entire hall were riveted by the scene playing out in front of them though some of the older ones were now scoffing at Hermione attempting a summoning charm, that was until two jackets flew into the hall.

Minerva feared she knew the answer but had to ask, "Mr and Mrs Potter, can I ask what you are doing?"

Hermione had it all figured out, "We'll take a walk to Hogsmead, should be able to find a public floo there that will allow us to reach the Leaky Cauldron, from there it's a tube and taxi back home! This morning's incident proves beyond doubt we were both lied to, if this is the best magical school then I pity the rest. That poorly disguised attempt to deny us our rights before we've even finished breakfast on our first morning has indicated what we can expect if we stay here, especially since neither our head of house nor the headmaster has spoken a word in our defence."

Albus was now dragged into this, he'd been angry with what Minerva had told him last night, as well as her refusal to bring Harry to his office, he was pleased that his head of Slytherin had cleverly negated their plans for a weekend away from Hogwarts only for the whole thing to blow up in his face. "I'm afraid we can't allow you just to walk out of here, as headmaster I act 'in loco parentis' while you are in Hogwarts and don't think this action is in your best interests."

Hermione's sweet smile belied the power in her words, "That is of course correct headmaster but you must also know our marriage negates that clause, or were you just hoping we didn't know that fact. Harry is my husband and head of House therefore 'in loco parentis' doesn't apply here."

Albus tried again, certain he would be successful this time. "Mr Potter wouldn't you rather be at Hogwarts than living with your aunt and uncle?"

Harry couldn't believe his luck, "Oh so you are aware of my living conditions there? I have no intention of returning to that house ever again and will be contacting the ministry to find out why I was left on their doorstep in the first place. If that's how the magical world deals with orphans, then I want nothing to do with it or Hogwarts."

That last statement could be very bad for Albus, he didn't want events of that night looked into too closely and needed the boy staying in Privet Drive. That blasted ring was some of the oldest and most powerful magic their world possessed, even killing the girl wouldn't alter Harry's status as head of house. "Mr Potter, should you leave Hogwarts this way, it could mean the snapping of your wand and..."

Albus never got to say any more as the crack of the boy's wand breaking silenced him, Harry threw the broken wand onto the floor and offered his arm to Hermione, "Ready to go home Mrs Potter? You were right we should never have agreed to come here in the first place, the schools abroad look so much better. We'll keep in touch Neville."

Neville was forced to concede that Harry wasn't kidding when he said they could take care of themselves, they'd taken down five Weasleys in about ten seconds.

Ginny Weasley watched as her dreams crashed to the floor even quicker than her family, Harry left with Mrs Potter on his arm, and Harry Potter's broken wand had landed at her feet, as if to emphasise she would never now marry the boy-who-lived.

A silent and stunned great hall watched as the young couple walked out the doors, the only audible sound was a mixture of crying and groans of pain coming from the semi-conscious Ron Weasley.

A/N Thanks for reading

I will no longer be indicating which story I will update next, since it's not until I sit at my laptop and begin typing that I know for sure. Updates will still be weekly though.

As Scotland is currently gripped by its worse winter for more than half a century, with the mercury not being above freezing for about a month and getting down to below minus twenty, the temptation to write about sunshine, beaches and palm trees is pretty strong.

Chapter 3

Neville looked on as the only two friends he'd ever made walked out of Hogwarts, at least they said they would stay in touch, his gaze swept round the hall at the devastation left in their wake.

Harry and Hermione had hardly stepped out the castle when bedlam erupted.

Molly Weasley had been released from Hermione's spell and was spitting mad, as well as spitting porridge over everyone within range as she ranted, "Where is the little bastard? I'm going to kill him! How dare he do this to me and my family, who does the little shit think he is..."

This was more than enough for the tabby cat that was Minerva McGonagall, two of her cubs had just been hounded out of the castle by this woman who had the audacity to stand there and complain! The head lioness of Gryffindor roared into action, ready to take on all comers in defence of her young lions, "That 'little shit' was sitting at his house table having breakfast when he was attacked by a madwoman who has no right to be here. Mr Potter has snapped his wand and left Hogwarts, when that news breaks I hope you have a deep hole to hide in because I for one will be ensuring the blame finds its way to the appropriate figures."

Minerva was looking directly at Snape when she made that last comment and the unconcerned smirk on his face was like a red rag to a bull. Years of biting her tongue and putting up with this shit had worn her down to the point where her temper finally snapped beyond repair. Minerva now had her wand in her hand as she tried to make-up for letting down the son of her late friends so badly, "From now on I shall be using my position as deputy headmistress to investigate all points taken and detentions allocated against members of my house. Should I find any member of staff discriminating against Gryffindor they will receive an official reprimand, I would also like to remind staff that their contracts stipulate that three reprimands is an automatic one month unpaid suspension and a mandatory review by the board."

Dumbledore had left his seat at this and made his way down to where the students sat, "Professor McGonagall I hardly think this is the place to be holding such a discussion."

"On the contrary headmaster I think this is exactly the place to hold this discussion, you discourage heads of house from interfering in punishments handed out by other heads, to your mind this promotes staff unity, to my mind it just allows some to get away with reprehensible behaviour that will no longer be tolerated by me. This is not up for discussion as it clearly falls within the remit of deputy, should you wish to change this it would require my sacking, the choice is yours headmaster and I would appreciate your answer now before I begin teaching this year's classes."

Albus was seething with anger, all he'd asked the stupid woman to do was make sure Harry got on the train, how was it possible for her to muck that up so spectacularly? Now, not only had the boy left the castle but Minerva was rounding on Severus, something Albus would have to try to deflect. It was time for the all-knowing, all-powerful Dumbledore to make an appearance.

Albus picked up the broken wand and noticed that Fawkes feather still held the two parts together, taking out the elder wand he managed to repair the shattered holly in front of everyone, once more enhancing his reputation as a great wizard. Handing it towards Minerva he was using his most reassuring voice, "No one will be getting sacked and I am certain we will see young Mr Potter in these halls again, please look after this for him until that time."

Minerva wasn't about to be placated by a show of power and calming words, "Should the Potters decide to return I will be taking them under my wing, Mrs Potter was very clear in her words that she doesn't trust any of the staff here enough to protect her husband. I happen to agree with that assessment but will do my utmost to earn that trust, if that means putting myself between them and anyone wishing to do the young married couple wrong then so be it. I hope everyone here is proud of the way we welcomed the boy who rid us of you-know-who back to the magical world?"

She snatched the wand out of Dumbledore's hand before Molly started screeching again, "Married? How can he be married?"

Minerva once more turned her attention to the woman, who may have wiped her face but still had porridge in her hair, "That is none of your business, just like you have no business being in this hall. Kindly leave before I call the aurors and have you removed, you and your family have caused quite enough trouble for one day."

Albus now had two angry women on his hands so called for reinforcements, while he waved his wand over Ronald to stop the bleeding from his nose and vanish the bloody mess, he called for Fawkes to bring the sorting hat. "Let's get young Ronald sorted into Gryffindor before we hand him over to Poppy's gentle care, then Molly here can take little Ginevra back home."

Fawkes soothing song calmed tempers and amazed the students, Ron walked shakily to the Gryffindor table before sitting down, Albus popped the hat on the boys head only to discover that this morning had yet another shock in store for him.

"Slytherin!" screamed the hat after only seconds and Ronald Weasley immediately lost his breakfast all over the Gryffindor table, considering the amount he ate, everyone agreed it was the most impressive non-potions derived display of projectile vomiting seen in Hogwarts for many a year.

Severus Snape was delighted his barb had gotten that spawn of James Potter out of Hogwarts so easily, nothing Minerva said had managed to dampen that delight as he was certain Albus would somehow neuter all attempts to exercise her authority. He was having a wonderful morning until that tattered old hat had the nerve to place a Weasley in his house, was this some sick joke?

Ron's robes had already acquired their green trim with that hated badge over his heart, this was not the introduction to Hogwarts he'd looked forward to ever since he was old enough to say the word. His nose still hurt, his balls felt as if they'd been introduced to a bacon slicer and he had his own colour coordinating green vomit all down

his robes, Ron had only one thing on his mind, "Mum, can I go back home with you and Ginny?"

Molly thought she must have gotten some of that porridge in her ears as she could have sworn that hat said Slytherin, Weasleys never went anywhere else but Gryffindor. Seeing her son in those detestable colours after the morning she was having, was just placing a cherry on top of the piles of shit. "Either my boy gets re-sorted or I'm taking him home with me!"

Minerva wasn't for budging an inch, "The sorting hat is an ancient magical artefact, not something you can order about just because you don't agree with it. The decision stands and you can take as many Weasleys home with you as you like, every one of them was drawing their wands on two first years, including a Gryffindor prefect."

"They were defending their mother who was under attack..." Dumbledore never got to finish as McGonagall chewed his argument to shreds.

"So it doesn't matter that Mrs Potter was protecting her husband from an intruder, they were going to be punished while the Weasleys escape? Not bloody likely, you all have a week's detention and I'll have that badge back Percy."

Minerva had wanted to give the position to Wood but Albus had convinced her that Percy deserved it more, there was just something about the boy that appeared too Slytherin for her liking, so Minerva twisted the knife. "Drawing your wand on a first year is inexcusable, losing to that same first year just confirms you're not prefect material."

Albus tried something to prevent the entire morning turning into a total dung-bomb, "Terrance could you be mistaken in your decision to place young Mr Weasley in Slytherin?"

The hat seemed to think for a minute before answering, "I could be mistaken," the occupants of the hall held their breath waiting on the hat's next words, "but I'm not. The lad has neither the smarts for Ravenclaw nor the loyalty demanded of Hufflepuff, by his own

admission he'd rather go home than be in Slytherin, which hardly displays the courage required for Gryffindor. You let two of the bravest children I've ever sorted walk out the door because you refused to help them, I'm curious headmaster what's so special about this one?"

Albus had no answer, the Weasleys were part of his master plan to befriend Harry and keep the lad humble. With a wife now in the picture, Molly's recent deeds and Ronald in Slytherin, that plan was in tiny little pieces but perhaps the Weasleys leaving Hogwarts could be used to entice the Potters back? "I'm sorry young man but you must either join your housemates or return home."

"I shall be removing all my children from Hogwarts and rest assured, I shall be contacting the board of governors about the treatment I received here today."

McGonagall still refused to back down an inch, "Rest assured Mrs Weasley I shall be contacting the DMLE about your behaviour here today, should the Potters wish to press charges I would quite happily agree to be a witness against all involved in this travesty."

The twins fell on their mother, begging that she reconsider but their pleas were in vain, "You're all coming home now, your father can make the final decision tonight."

Percy had been publicly humiliated not once but twice, first an eleven-year-old with no magical training beat him in a fight, then his head of house took his badge and said he wasn't cut out to be a prefect. He couldn't wait to get out of here and wasn't sure if he wanted to come back.

Filius and Pomona had watched this morning's proceedings with great interest, the Potters leaving would be the front page of the Prophet for days to come, but it might actually be worth it to see their friend assert her authority. Both intended to insure she didn't slip back to just blindly following Albus, watching as the Weasley family also left Hogwarts gave them some idea what a hacked-off McGonagall was capable of.

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Harry and Hermione were strolling hand-in-hand down to Hogsmead, neither quite believing what they'd just done. "You know someone will be coming after us, the old man won't let you walk away from his influence, you're too important to his plans."

Harry wore a wry smile, "I've had lots of time to ponder about this since the night Snape killed him and I think I finally understand Dumbledore. He's utterly convinced that, for the greater good of the magical world, I must walk up to Voldemort and let him kill me, so he managed my entire life towards achieving that goal."

"Bugger that Mr Potter, you have a wife to consider now!"

"I'm also pretty sure I don't have the horcrux inside my head, which renders the whole scenario obsolete, but my point is Dumbledore is not evil, he's delusional. He gave up his life for the greater good as he saw it and can't understand why someone else wouldn't do the same."

Hermione thought about this for a minute before replying, "Should we tell him?"

Harry was horrified, "Absolutely not! Dumbledore would think he was the only one who could possibly handle such information and oblivate the shit out of us, we'd be lucky to remember each other's names, far less that we were married. While I wouldn't class him as evil, that doesn't mean he hasn't made my life crap because it suited his vision of the greater good."

Hermione was sure Harry was correct and detested the idea of anyone messing with her head, "So how do we handle this?"

"Well I suspect the old man won't want to get personally involved, he likes to perform his manipulations through third parties or, if you prefer, get others to do his dirty work. We'll have time to figure out how to play this, I think we should return but on our terms. I would like to see my godfather free, ensure my godson not only gets born but

keeps his parents around for many years, we should also help Neville and Luna become the people we know they can be. Watching Neville standing there alone brought back just how clueless we were, I've never made a friend right away like that, the whole Weasley situation must have been staged managed right from the start. I'm so glad you dealt with him today."

Hermione was quiet for a moment, "I so wanted to kill him Harry, you have no idea how hard it was not to."

Harry now had his arm around her, "Hermione, had he laid a finger on you, nothing could have stopped me from killing him. To hell with everything else, you are by far the most important consideration in my life."

She gave a weak smile, "Thanks Harry, although it was good to feel my foot connecting with his bits I think I'd still rather have killed him, does that mean I'm going dark?"

"No darker than me love, Molly and Percy are definitely on my hit list. I don't think I could take down Ginny as she's still a child but Ron is another matter entirely, we'll have to play it by ear with the twins."

"Do we have the right to make those decisions Harry?"

"If we don't then who does love, we've seen the future and it's not pleasant. If we start second-guessing we'll drive ourselves nuts, do you think Draco is saveable if given more chances? He was still trying to kill us in the final battle and only the Malfoy money saved him from Azkaban."

"Your right Harry, Malfoy had chance after chance and made no attempt to change his ways, he's a pureblood supremacist and, since it got him everything he ever wanted, sees no point in changing. If we try to alter the system, sooner or later we're going to have to deal with the Malfoys."

"We don't need to decide everything right now, I'm still not sure getting out the country isn't our best option. I think we need to head to

Gringotts and find out what our marriage status does for us, face the goblins then the Grangers, oh what a lovely day in prospect.”

“My parents loved you before and will fall in love with you all over again, how could they not?”

Harry tried to hold on to that thought as they entered the Three Broomsticks to floo into the Leaky Cauldron.

-oOoOo-

Over two hours later and Harry led a shaky Hermione out of Gringotts, deciding his wife could use a seat he pointed the dazed witch in the direction of Fortescue’s ice cream parlor.

Ordering a sundae for each of them, Harry waited until the waitress left before speaking. “The arrogance of Dumbledore strikes again, because he doesn’t know how to deal with something he just assumes no one else does. The goblin method of forcing the horcrux into a pig, slaughtering the animal and then roasting the carcass for a feast is not only brilliant but poetic justice.”

Hermione gave an involuntary shudder with the thought she might never eat a ham sandwich again as Harry continued, “I just wish we had thought to ask them for help the last time instead of having to break into that bitch’s vault, the procedure doesn’t harm the item so the cup will be returned to the Lestrangle vault undamaged and we’ll be able to save Ravenclaw’s diadem.”

Harry’s next word was ‘ouch!’ as Hermione punched him none too gently on the upper arm, “What was that for?”

“Harry James Potter why the hell didn’t you tell me you were at least ten times richer than the Malfoy’s?”

“Hermione love I had no idea, I’d only been in Gringotts once since we rather hurriedly left it riding a dragon, and that day my only concern was hoping I had enough gold to buy the woman I loved a ring worthy of her. When I discovered what we now know is the Potter

ring, the only other thing I was interested in was collecting the Black island portkey. The goblins advised I needed a will so I set up a trust fund like mine for Teddy and named you and him my main beneficiaries, Luna and Neville got a little but I just signed my name. They dealt with all the arrangements, I never once looked at the amounts as I was so bloody worried you were going to turn me down, if you had said no then all the gold in Gringotts would have been little compensation.”

Hermione was staring at the new dragon skin wallet with tears in her eyes, “I’m sorry Hermione, but I know you never married me for my money since neither of us knew it was there?”

“It’s not that Harry, my new Gringotts card has ‘Hermione Jane Potter’ printed on it and nothing can change that, you have no idea how many nights I lay in bed dreaming of this. We’re legally married and neither the ministry nor the Wizengamot can alter that fact, I was sure there would be some loophole they could use to bring us back under their control.”

The waitress returned with the ice cream and they quietly enjoyed the treat while still trying to digest all that had happened this morning, “How would my wife like to try out her new card in Flourish and Blotts?”

“I think my husband is either trying to spoil me or delay meeting his in-laws, which is it sir?”

Harry blushed at being so easily read, he should have expected Hermione to see right through him, “A little of both love.” She leaned over and gave him a kiss on the cheek for being so sweet before switching to her ‘must dash to the library’ expression as the idea hit home.

“Harry we know the Prophet is going to be all over us so why don’t we march in there and give them the story we want printed, before anyone else has time to put their slant on it. Follow that up with a letter to the head of the DMLE...”

The look of dread on Harry's face had nothing to do with thoughts of the Daily Prophet, "Oh shit! Hermione I left Hedwig in Hogwarts, I released her in Kings Cross station yesterday so I could shrink her cage before racing off to find you. She's smart enough to find me at your parents but that's just what I don't need, her mad at me as well."

Hermione understood how much his owl meant to Harry and hadn't considered going back in time would save her as well, "Let's add a stop to the Eeylops Owl Emporium for a nice perch and some special owl treats, you know she'll forgive you, eventually."

"I only hope we can say the same about your mother, I love the woman but she can be downright scary."

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The woman in question was sitting finishing off the Times crossword in their lounge, the Granger's dental practice was very successful, allowing them both the luxury of having Monday and Friday afternoon's off. When Hermione walked in, leading a very nervous bespectacled young boy by the hand, she felt as if a cricket bat had just whacked the back of her head.

Her scream had her husband racing from their home office to find his wife on her knees sobbing, with her arms around two children, one of whom they'd placed on a magical train to Scotland yesterday.

When the green eyes behind the glasses met Dan's, the dentist also found himself on his knees, his legs felt as if they'd turned to jelly and wouldn't support his weight. The emotions that kicked-in overwhelmed the father who thought he would never see his daughter and her young man again, Dan's voice was trembling nearly as much as he was, "I asked you to bring her home Harry and you did, I don't now how you did it son but I always believed you would."

Hermione broke away from her mum and raced into her father's open arms but Emma still had a death grip on Harry and could be heard mumbling 'thank you' between sobs.

“Dad you remember?”

He had his arms around his daughter with the intention of never letting her go again, “The second I saw Harry it was like you removing that memory charm in Australia, it all came flooding back. Your phone was still on and we heard everything as they led you away, I was trying to comfort your mother and convince her we needed to leave when two strangers appeared in the house. The last thing I remember is calling out the password Harry gave us and we disappeared, but how did we get back to here? That was Christmas Eve 1998, this is what, September 1991?”

“Yes dad and you have no idea how relieved Harry will be that you remember everything, he was terrified walking up the drive.”

“Why were you terrified of us Harry?” asked Emma, who still had a tight hold of him meaning there was no escape.

“Eh well you see it’s like this...” Harry decided just to blurt it out into the open, “Hermione and I are married!”

Laughter was not the response they expected but that died the second Emma recognised the diamond adorning her daughter’s finger, “Right you two, sit down and start talking.”

Because their memories were almost ‘current’ with their situation it was only the last twenty-four ours that they had to bring them up to date with.

When they finished Emma hugged them both, “Even death couldn’t separate you two, I always knew Harry was the one for you darling and, although you physically appear to be eleven I couldn’t be happier that you’re together. We’ve seen the alternative and intend to make sure it never happens like that again.”

“First thing tomorrow we’re off down the travel agents, I think Australia beckons. Why the hell should you risk your lives for these bastards after the way they treated you both, we know your real ages but please listen to us on this.” Dan pleaded.

“I think Australia is definitely in our future but we have a few things to do here first, knowing that Gringotts will destroy horcruxes, for a fee, takes an incredible amount of pressure off. We also know where another two are, just sitting waiting on us picking them up, combined with the cup and the one in my head already gone we’re over half way there. The diary isn’t available to us until next summer and I really would like some help to get the ring as it has traps surrounding it.”

Harry was appealing to Dan who understandably wanted the four of them on the first plane out the country, “There are people who are important to us we can help, and in some cases save their lives. If we can destroy the horcruxes then that only leaves the snake, who knows if the prophecy is actually still valid since I’ve already killed him? I will quit the country as soon as those goals are met as I have no intention of making Hermione the youngest widow in Britain. We will be ruthless and take no chances, at the first sign of not being able to handle something I’ll pay for first class tickets on the next available plane.”

Dan looked at his new son-in-law as if he was joking.

“Trust me dad, Harry could buy the plane if he wanted. Mr Potter here conveniently forgot to mention that he’s one of the richest wizard’s in Britain.”

“I think you’ll find that’s ‘we’ Mrs Potter, you have as much access to our vaults and properties as I do.”

Hermione blushing took out her new passport and bank card out the brand new bottomless bag they’d purchased in the alley, she also took out the document she’d been looking for, “We also hired ourselves a lawyer that the goblins recommended, he drew up these.”

Emma took one glance at them before giving the order, “Dan, get the car keys!”

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When the doorbell rang Petunia wondered who it was, she quickly pulled a cover over her Dudders who was laying face-down on the sofa, his surgeon said the poor little trooper wouldn't be able to sit for a few days yet.

She opened the door to find an immaculately dressed couple standing there, "Mrs Petunia Dursley? Hi I'm Dr Emma Granger and this is my husband Dr Daniel Granger, can we come in?"

"Oh yes please, we thought that your clinic was a bit on the expensive side but we never realised that you made house calls, my little darling is right in here."

Petunia led them straight into the lounge where the Dursley males were glued to the TV screen, she whipped the cover off Dudley. "We've been trying to make sure the wound remains clean but it's not an easy job, I can't tell you how pleased I am that you can change his bandages and..."

Petunia was interrupted by a hated voice, "Wow Dud, full moon tonight! Hermione love you might want to cover your eyes from this hideous sight, personally I think they cut off your best feature cousin, it was the only part of your body that could even remotely be considered cute."

Vernon attempted to spring out of his chair at Harry, it actually took three attempts before he managed to become vertical, though that didn't stop him yelling at the top of his voice. "Freak! What are you doing back here? Did they discover what a useless waste of space you really are and kick you out?"

Harry wandlessly pushed the astonished walrus back into his chair, "No uncle I was just missing my family so much I wanted to come home," the sarcasm in his voice was as unmistakable as the power he now appeared to wield. "Dan would you have a look in the cupboard under the stairs?"

If he thought this was a strange request, Dan didn't say but when he saw the panicked expressions on the Dudley's faces he went and

looked anyway. When he came back, his fists were clenched and his eyes were boring into Vernon although it was to Harry he spoke, "How long?"

"All my life actually, it was only last month they moved me into Dudley's second bedroom, they were afraid the magic users would find out."

Emma was getting nothing but barely controlled rage from her husband so she went to see what the fuss was about, seconds later she came charging back in and smacked Petunia on the jaw. "How could any mother treat a child like that? Far less one as wonderful as your nephew, Harry let's get the police involved, I'm sure they would be arrested for child cruelty."

Harry shook his head, "That might still happen but I just want to be rid of them." Hermione took some documents out her bag before removing her camera and heading towards the cupboard.

"Right, here's the deal. Sign these papers and the Grangers will become my legal guardians, if you don't object it will be fast tracked through the courts and you'll never see or hear from me again. Fight it and I'll tell everyone the way you treated me, including the pictures of my 'bedroom' Hermione's now taking." To let that sink in Harry shouted through to her, "Be sure to get some of Dudley's bedroom for comparison love," before returning his attention to his relatives, "anyway the choice is yours."

Vernon snatched the paper out of Harry's hands, "Just show me where I sign boy, we have no intention of fighting this, we never wanted you here in the first place but were denied a choice in the matter."

Petunia was still rubbing her face and afraid to say anything in case she got hit again, the man appeared ready to rip them all limb from limb, she very quickly and happily signed the form.

Dudley lay face down with both hands covering the site of his very recent surgical procedure, the thought of another tail had him

whimpering in fear. As they didn't know if this couple were magical or not, he just assumed the worst and kept very quiet.

The paper was signed before Hermione whipped her wand out and, to the absolute horror of the Dursleys, transfigured the coffee table into a live pig. "This is what I wanted to do with you but my Harry won't let me, how he learned compassion and morals while living with you disgusting people is an unexplainable wonder. Should we meet again nothing will stop me having my revenge on Harry's behalf, it will be the slaughterhouse for you pigs rather than surgery you'll be facing." With a casual flick of her wand the squealing stopped as the pig was once more a table, "Let's get out of here before I do something they'll regret."

As the four left their house the Dursleys didn't know whether to cheer, cringe or cry. If only they could believe they would never see the boy again the choice would be easy, as easy as deciding they definitely didn't want to lay eyes on that girl again. Pigs would fly before they would contest Harry leaving for good but when your table can change into a porker then flying hogs was a distinct possibility.

Back in the car heading out of Little Whining Harry had a suggestion, "Pick a restaurant and Hermione will buy us all dinner."

"Why Hermione?" her mother asked.

"Oh she just loves handing over her card and signing her name as Hermione Potter!"

-oOoOo-

It was a harassed Arthur Weasley who exited the fireplace at the Burrow, he started bemoaning his luck the second he left the floo, "What a day I've had, you've no idea the uproar your little spat in the station caused, I was getting dirty looks all day about the extra work you created but when word spread it was the-boy-who-lived, I'm lucky still to be in a job."

He'd walked from the living room into the kitchen while talking and got a shock to see four of his sons sitting there instead of being at Hogwarts, Arthur had a very bad feeling about this. "What happened?" he asked, though dreading the answer.

What happened was five people all started trying to tell him their version of events at the same time, making the noise unbearable, even for the Weasley kitchen.

"QUIET!" He shouted before Arthur noticed the apple of his eye sitting quietly with tears running down her cheeks, "Ginny tell me what happened please?" his whole demeanour warned the rest of his tribe not to interrupt.

Her voice was soft and she seemed far away but Ginny's words struck fear into her father's heart, "He was just sitting there quietly eating his porridge when she went tearing after him like a bear, his wife protected him and between the two of them put these four on the floor. He then snapped his wand and threw it at my feet before both Potters walked out of Hogwarts, I'll never get to go now dad or meet him, she's ruined everything!"

Arthur turned pleadingly to his wife, "Please tell me you didn't attack the-boy-who-lived in the middle of Hogwarts?"

"No I didn't," Arthur's relief was short lived, "That little bitch of his cursed me before I could get my hands on him and give the little shit a piece of my mind..."

Arthur roared at his wife, "What bloody right have you to go anywhere near that boy? Have you any idea what you've done or just how serious this is? Our world has waited nearly ten years for Harry Potter to return, now, because of your actions, he's snapped his wand and left Hogwarts." The repercussions of this were making Arthur feel sick, "It's probably just as well you lot got sent home because when I get fired tomorrow we wouldn't have been able to afford Hogwarts anyway."

George corrected his father, "We didn't get sent home, Ron got sorted into Slytherin and didn't want to go there, Mum demanded they change it or we were all coming home."

Fred filled in the rest of this expanding horror story, "McGonagall then took Percy's badge for getting beat-up by a firstie and told us we were welcome to leave."

His twin finished off the sorry tale, "We begged to stay but mum dragged us all home."

The picture being painted here was not a pretty one, Arthur was very disappointed in his family so started with his youngest son, "You didn't get the house you wanted so came crying home to mummy, is that it?" he then turned to his wife, "and you bloody encouraged him instead of telling him to suck it up and make the best of it, what kind of example does that set?" Finally his gaze turned to Percy, "You were a prefect, why were you fighting with a first year anyway?"

Arthur could see the storm coming but was unable to stop it, his wife would be portrayed as the wicked witch of the West Country and his family would be lucky if they didn't have to move to a far away land where they'd never heard of the name Weasley.

-oOoOo-

Albus sat in his office, drinking cocoa and wondering how the last twenty-four hours had gotten away from him so disastrously. His eyes cast a glance at the silver instruments that had monitored Harry Potter for the last decade, the only reading he could get now was that the wards at Privet Drive had totally collapsed. On Mr Potter's health or whereabouts there was nothing, it was as if the boy he cast them on didn't exist.

Albus could only assume that his marriage had negated all his monitoring charms as the boy would now be considered an adult, this did not bode well for his plans.

He would give the Potters and Minerva a couple of days to calm down before suggesting she make contact with them again, he didn't

want to become personally involved unless absolutely necessary, Minerva's comment about them wishing to move to Australia struck fear into his heart.

If Harry Potter emigrated to the other side of the world he would be condemning Britain to Voldemort's rule, that could not be allowed to happen. Having been raised and treated the way he was now worked against his plans, Harry's current circumstances would also make telling him the prophecy at this time a disaster.

Not only would Harry have no reason to lay down his life, with his wealth and a new wife, the boy would in all likelihood tell him he owed the magical world nothing, probably getting out of the country as quickly as possible.

What Albus needed was some way to connect Harry to the wizarding community, at the moment his only positive experience was meeting the young Longbottom boy. He could only hope the events of today didn't become public knowledge before the couple could be enticed back to Hogwarts.

Albus had no idea that the next issue of the Prophet would blow the whole sorry scandal wide open, combined with letters from the Potters and McGonagall making their way to Amelia Bones would see him being asked questions he didn't really want to answer.

-oOoOo-

Back in Crawley four tired people were discussing their next move, "I don't think I can go to work every day as if nothing has changed, we've already lived the next seven years and I can't do that again, not without slipping up badly."

"Emma there are no financial reasons for you to continue working, we can clear the mortgage on your home and provide anything you want. Would you like to roam the world searching for a nice bolt hole for us? No problem, it's yours."

“Harry you’re our son-in-law and we’re also going to be your guardians, can we give mum a try? Your offer sounds fantastic but if Dan and I sell our practice we will be financially quite comfortable, and apparently we no longer have to worry about Hermione’s future, I was really thinking more of a change of direction. Something like charity work appeals to me, nothing with a lot of ties in case it becomes necessary for us to leave at a moments notice.”

“I think you’re right sweetheart, I’ll contact our lawyer in the morning to inform him we’re interested in selling. The thought of living those years over the exact same way again does not appeal to me either, this time travel seriously messes with your head. I mean what’s the point of going to the football when you already know the result?”

“It also messes with your energy levels, I’m knackered!” Hermione reached out her hand for Harry, “Time for bed love.”

Harry’s focus shifted immediately to his wife’s parents but it was Emma who put his mind at rest, “Harry we trusted you with our girl when you were eighteen and she was nineteen, I think we can trust you now you’re both eleven.”

“You made one very serious mistake though Harry, you gave my daughter a credit card, I don’t need a prophecy to predict a shopping trip in your future.” Dan was failing valiantly in his attempt not to laugh at the looks his daughter was now dispatching in his direction.

“My husband and I will be going shopping tomorrow as he only owns the clothes he’s currently standing in, it was my intention to buy some gifts for my fabulous parents but don’t worry mum, we’ll still get you something.” Hermione couldn’t hold her stern expression any longer as a smile kept breaking through. She hugged them both.

“Thanks for making this so easy for us, my husband was really dreading informing my parents he’d just married your eleven-year-old daughter. I’m so glad you have those memories and can help us plan for the future, or is it the past?”

Harry placed his arm around her, “Too tired to care love, let’s get some sleep as I have a feeling tomorrows going to be a long day.”

A/N Thanks for reading

hapter 4

Waking with Hermione in his arms had been the norm with Harry for the last six months, waking with an eleven-year-old Hermione Potter in his arms was totally different yet just as wonderful.

He watched as his wife's large front teeth dug into her bottom lip, informing him that she was not only awake but deep in thought. He pulled her closer to him, "Ok love, spill it before you burst!"

Hermione could only smile at how well her husband knew her, "I was trying to figure out how my parents kept their memories and wondering if anyone else might."

He knew not to offer up some flippant answer when Hermione was in serious mode, "The sorting hat said the 'powers that be' wanted to help us, I don't think they could have helped me anymore yesterday than your mum and dad remembering us being a couple. I had visions of sleeping in the dog kennel in the back garden."

Hermione was giggling, "You know we don't have a dog, far less a kennel!"

"Your dad would have built one for the boy who dared to come near his daughter, bet the roof would have leaked as well."

Images of her dad out in the garden, sawing planks of wood while muttering about 'protecting his princess' had her shaking with laughter, Harry was probably closer to the truth than he thought.

"I can't think of anyone else who could really help us by retaining their memories."

"What about Sirius?" she offered quietly, unprepared for Harry bursting into laughter.

"Can you imagine anyone giving that sort of knowledge to a marauder? It would lead to total chaos, ok our way might lead us

there eventually but Sirius or Remus would see it as their duty to muck things up as much as possible just because they could.”

Hermione had to agree with him, “The only other person I could think of would be Luna, since we already know Neville didn’t.”

Harry was thoughtful for a minute, “Did you get a chance to talk with Luna about her time in Malfoy Manor when we were at Bill’s cottage?”

Hermione shook her head, “I was still recovering myself and you had just buried Dobby, not one of our better days.”

“I spoke to her a little and there was pain behind those lovely eyes, I don’t know if it was because her father betrayed us or her experiences at the manor. Knowing who we were dealing with, nothing would surprise me with those animals.”

Hermione had his ribs almost squealing in protest with how tight she was holding him, “If that was the case then I hope she doesn’t get her memories back, we’ll get to know her much sooner and I promise to be a better friend this time.”

Harry kissed the tension away before answering, “We both will love.”

-oOoOo-

Breakfast time in the Grangers and the four fell easily into their well-established pattern, they had been doing it as a family for six months in Australia, the only difference here was that they now had a snowy owl perched on Harry’s shoulder and Hermione fed Hedwig all her bacon.

“Well I’ll see our lawyers first thing this morning; get them on to Harry’s guardianship and finding a buyer for our practice.”

Emma nodded in agreement, “While you’re in there I’ll check the travel agents across the street for brochures on Australia, perhaps you two could pick up some books while you’re out shopping?” she noticed Hermione had her head lowered so not to look at them,

“Hermione love, that’s not a criticism of you, we really enjoyed our time there in the place you chose for us but we have other considerations to take into account this time. We’ll be a family and I would prefer somewhere that had a school for you both nearby, well at least closer than five hundred miles and preferably one we could at least see.”

Hermione understood, “We’ll try to find information on Australian magical schools but the British ministry doesn’t seem too keen on supplying information about alternatives to Hogwarts. We may have better luck in Gringotts than Flourish and Blots. That will allow us to do our clothes shopping in London.”

The expression on his wife’s face was one Harry had only previously associated with libraries, he would quickly come to realise that Hermione adored shopping, not for her self per se but the chance to buy her husband nice things was better than a book.

-oOoOo-

Breakfast at the Burrow was nothing like routine, their father’s rant at them last night was so surprising that it forced the family to sit back and take notice. The only conclusions they could draw from his words was that the Weasley family were in serious trouble. They had always known they were poor but they might now get the chance to discover what poor really meant. It wasn’t being unable to afford the latest broom or buy new books for school, they’d always had food on the table and clothes on their backs, if their father lost his job that might not be the case.

Molly was bustling about in her kitchen not really accomplishing anything, after the children had been sent to bed, Arthur had very carefully yet rather forcibly explained exactly how much trouble her actions had landed them in. While seriously worried her thoughts couldn’t help but keep returning to another matter.

Her pipe dream of Ginny marrying the-boy-who-lived and solving all their financial problems would appear to be just that. The lad was the spitting image of James and her Ginny could easily be mistaken for a younger Lily Potter, how could the boy be married to the bucked-

toothed, bushy haired bitch when he was only eleven? It wasn't the young age that bothered Molly, more the thought that she could have her Ginny in place and her hands all over the Potter money years sooner than originally planned.

She was rudely ejected from her muse by the highly unusual spectacle of her husband cursing up a storm, she approached and noticed the object of his venomous outburst was this morning's Prophet.

"We're in so much shit, it's even worse than I thought!"

The first thing Molly noticed was a picture of the lad with that bitch, before her blood got time to boil the headlines cured that affliction and left her requiring to sit.

Boy-Who-Lives-Snapped-Wand-And-Left!

Harry Potter and his wife were attacked by a woman and her family of redheaded children while eating breakfast in Hogwarts yesterday. The Hogwarts staff and the Headmaster stood by and left the young couple to defend themselves, only to then punish the Potters for doing so. This was the final straw which saw his broken wand laying on the castle floor, after the headmaster's thinly veiled attempts at threatening him with having his wand snapped failed to keep them in Hogwarts.

Harry Potter exclusively revealed the reason behind this action to the Daily Prophet, these are his own words, unedited as was our agreement with the young man.

This was not the action of a petulant child, rather of someone who gave the British Magical community one last chance and it failed just as spectacularly as all my other dealings with it. It is now my intention to leave these shores for good, since the country holds nothing but bad memories for me.

To explain will require me revealing details I might wish to remain hidden but I really am past caring, the story begins in the evening of the first of November 1981.

From what I have since read, very few of your readers will remember this day as most were spending their time celebrating; meanwhile an orphan was left on a muggle doorstep with a letter pinned to his blanket. That orphan was me, is this the way adoption usually happens in the magical world? Strike one against!

The muggles on whose doorstep I was left hated magic with a passion, thus my life was made hell. Living in a cupboard with barely enough food to keep me alive, not knowing my parents names far less my heritage. I have to this day yet to see a picture of them. No one ever checked up on me, I was just abandoned there, again I ask is this what normally happens in the magical world? I spent ten years of my life believing my parents were drunks who died in a car crash that gave me the scar on my forehead. For that alone I should leave the country, never to return. Strike two against!

When my girlfriend, now wife became eleven she received a visit from Professor McGonagall. The professor explained in great detail to Hermione and her nonmagical parents exactly what was involved with her being a witch and attending Hogwarts.

Hermione had already decided not to attend without me when she discovered her boyfriends name in a magical book, it's in quite a few of them apparently. The dates and scar all fitted so we both threw ourselves into learning as much as we could and waited to see if I would be contacted, on my eleventh birthday I received a visit from Hagrid.

He was incensed that I had been told nothing of the magical world and was under the impression that he was delivering the son of his friends their Hogwarts letter. He's a smashing big guy who I would consider a friend but he would be the first to admit he was ill equipped to inform a basic muggle born on the magical world and Hogwarts.

At Kings Cross I was accosted by a strange plump lady with red hair that just wouldn't take no for an answer as she tried to drag me off somewhere, the station authorities dealt with her as I sped to board the train and find my Hermione.

The same woman attacked me next morning as I sat having breakfast and only my wife's quick reactions saved me from her obvious rage. Is it usual to have intruders walk right in to your school unopposed and attack students? Strike three against!

My wife and I then had to defend ourselves against four of her children while the staff watched on, only when we had them subdued did the staff act. A greasy-haired professor by the name of Snipe gave Hermione and me detentions in a childish attempt to keep us in the castle. Backed-up by a Headmaster who was more interested in detaining us in the castle than seeing justice done, isn't he the Supreme Mugwump in charge of the courts? Strike four and time to get out of there.

The expression of undisguised glee on Snipe's face as we left the castle worried me, I don't know what the man teaches but I wouldn't want my wife or me anywhere near the creep. In the muggle world all teachers are vetted to ensure they're suitable to be teaching children. Even just from first impressions I could never imagine him passing any serious examination of his personality, far less teaching methods.

After the way the magical world had treated me we had decided to give it one last try, one day in Hogwarts was enough to let us see this was not for the Potters. We had originally looked at moving abroad and that is now the route we will take, my wife and I came into the newspaper to tell our story before the rumours take over.

Through extensive research the Prophet can reveal that the family in question are the Weasleys and Snipe is none other than head of Slytherin, potions professor Severus Snape.

Mr Potter wasn't prepared to answer any questions but could understand that our readers would want to know how it was possible for him to be married at eleven, he then gave the Prophet the following explanation.

Hermione has been my best friend for many years before becoming my girlfriend. On the train to Hogwarts I asked her to always be mine and she answered that she would as I placed a ring on her finger.

The ring came from my vault and it turned out to be the Potter family ring. Combined with our feelings towards each other this resulted in us becoming married. As marriage was always going to be in our future together, this has just brought the happy event forward a few years. I just hope her father forgives me for not asking his permission first.

We here at the Prophet can't help but think that any young witch returning home to inform her parents she was married to Harry Potter would be just cause for a massive party of epic proportions.

Having spoken to this lovely young couple we call on the ministry to investigate the bizarre and totally irregular occurrences in this young man's life and answer the glaring questions that his interview has thrown up.

Why was the boy who saved us all, abandoned at night on a muggle doorstep?

Why was he never checked-up on and left ignorant of our world?

Are our children really safe at Hogwarts when people can just walk right in there and attack a student eating breakfast in the great hall?

What part did Albus Dumbledore play in all this? Remember the final event that decided the Potters to leave our country happened right in front of him.

Our country has at most a few days to convince this wonderful young couple that Britain is, and can be their home, before the last members of an ancient and noble family leaves us for good. Is this really what James and Lilly Potter sacrificed their lives for, to see their son and his bride forced to leave the country they died saving?

Arthur could see no way his family could stay in the country now, unfortunately he didn't see any way for them to leave it either. Their only asset was the land their house was built on, he wasn't naïve enough to think their house added anything to the value of the land, or that there would be buyers queuing up to take it off his hands.

He rose to head of to work when the ministry owl flew in the window, carrying a letter that had him sitting back down. Arthur discovered he wasn't sacked but 'indefinitely suspended without pay while investigations are carried out.' This was the ministry's way of forcing you to hand in your notice as you sought work elsewhere to feed your family.

It quickly became apparent that the ministry owl was the first of many headed in their direction, howler after howler arrived heading directly for Molly. Arthur managed to shepherd the children into the living room before having to answer the door.

He found Amelia Bones and two aurors standing there, "Morning Arthur, we're here to speak to Molly since we received two complaints about her behaviour. That was before this mornings Daily Prophet hit the breakfast tables, I assume she's at home?"

The scream of pain had them all rushing into the kitchen, Molly was surrounded by howlers that continually 'went off' but she was currently in agony as large yellow boils were growing on her face and hands.

"I started destroying them with my wand but one exploded and covered me in undiluted bubotuber pus. Get the children out of here in case there are any more like that."

The two aurors began scanning the continual stream of letters before destroying them while Arthur tended to his wife, gauze covered with neutralising potion was applied to her face and wrapped around her hands. Percy herded the others back into the living room, it was beginning to dawn on them just how much their lives were about to change.

Amelia was angry that someone could send something so dangerous by owl, supposing a child had opened that? Still, she had a job to do, "Molly Weasley I have received two complaints that demand I investigate your actions against Mr Harry Potter."

“My actions? What about this on my face and then what he said about me? I’ll ‘strange plump lady’ the little shit if I ever get my hands on him.”

Arthur was left wondering if he had enough gauze left to stuff in his wife’s mouth.

Amelia kept her cool, “Could you please explain to me what happened on the first of September in Kings Cross Station.”

“Albus asked me to keep an eye out for him, so when I saw the lad looking lost I offered to help him onto the platform but he started screaming that I was trying to take him away. Muggles came from everywhere and jumped all over me and my family, Ron got his jaw broken and the muggles drilled holes in it and wired it up. Didn’t see that mentioned in the bloody Prophet but then Ron’s not the famous boy-who-married-at-eleven!”

The slip about Albus would be chased up later but Amelia wanted to get to the meat of the complaint, “Mr Potter claims you neither introduced yourself nor would take no for an answer. He claims you grabbed him by the arm and started dragging him away...”

Molly interrupted, “I was leading him onto the bloody platform, I told him Ron was going to Hogwarts but he started shouting anyway.”

“Can I ask you how many times you’ve been to Kings Cross Station?”

Arthur could see the trap but his wife blundered on in anyway before he could say anything, “Dozens but I hardly see why that is significant.”

“Oh I was just wondering how many more children you’ve helped through the barrier?” Amelia asked.

“That was my first and bloody last if this is the thanks I get.”

“So, let me see if I’ve got this right. In all the years you’ve been going to Kings Cross, Harry Potter is the first child you’ve tried to help through the barrier. That leads me to question why Harry?”

“I told you, Dumbledore asked me to keep an eye out for him.”

“Ah but why were you keeping an eye out for him? Surely if the Headmaster suspected a student of his might not be able to make their way through the barrier, he should have sent a member of staff to ensure they made the train. Not entrust the saviour of our world to a parent who arrived in the station ten minutes before the train left.”

Molly could hardly say it was so Ron could befriend Harry Potter so she just had to bluster, “I don’t know, you’ll just have to ask Dumbledore.”

“Hogwarts is our next stop and you can be assured I’ll be asking him more than that. Now did you attack, or attempt to attack Harry Potter in Hogwarts?”

Molly had considered this carefully, “I was angry and wanted a word with the lad, I can see how it could be misconstrued as an attack.”

“I have two sources that tell me your hands were outstretched as if to throttle the child, had Mrs Potter not cast that spell it would appear the most likely outcome.”

“I will admit I was going to grab hold of him, but only because he’d slipped away the day before.”

“So you were in Hogwarts about to grab hold of a child?”

Molly figured this was the best she was going to get, “Yes.”

Amelia paused for a moment, “Those actions in themselves could see you hit with a heavy fine if the boy presses charges. I shall carry out further investigations when I reach Hogwarts, your children could be construed as aiding their mother so I don’t think there will be any charges against them. I was considering placing you under house

arrest, for your own safety I now believe I should. Do not leave the grounds of the Burrow or you will find yourself spending the night in entirely different accommodation. You will be hearing from us.”

They left, leaving Arthur to deal with the steady flow of owls. A heavy fine on top of their troubles could break his family, he hoped the boy wouldn't press charges.

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The boy in question was currently pressed up against the bar, trying to protect Hermione as best he could. They had casually walked into the Leaky Cauldron, en route to the alley and been instantly mobbed. Unlike the situation in Devon though, there was no anger here, these people were pleading with the Potters not to leave Britain.

Tom fired off a noisemaker spell to restore order, “We all want this young couple to stay but harassing them in my bar isn't going to help our case, stand back and give them some air.”

Harry remembered being uncomfortable the first time he entered here and was recognised but nothing had prepared him for this. Perhaps the alley wasn't such a good idea today.

Four aurors exited the floo, “What's the disturbance you reported Tom?”

“Young Mr and Mrs Potter here were getting mobbed by well-wishers; I managed to get them to take a few steps back though. Suffocating the couple they were.”

The lead auror approached the Potters, “Sorry about this folks, it would appear your story in the Prophet has caused quite a stir. Perhaps you would allow us to escort you to wherever you're going? We can then ensure this little scene isn't repeated.”

Hermione could see the clientele of the Leaky Cauldron hanging on every word so decided to leave them with something to think on. “That would be most considerate of you. We were heading to the

bookstore and then Gringotts to try to find information about Australian magical schools.”

There were groans in the pub and one woman even started crying as they made their way through to the alley entrance with an auror escort.

Hermione had her head on Harry’s shoulder as she whispered in his ear, “I wasn’t expecting this level of reaction, I wonder what it’s going to be like at Hogwarts when the papers are delivered.”

“I think we can expect a visitor from Hogwarts sooner rather than later as they try to entice us back to Scotland.” Harry replied.

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Hogwarts was in uproar, without any Weasleys present the students and staff turned their ire on Snape and Dumbledore. While this was happening, Minerva McGonagall sat serenely eating her breakfast, seemingly without a care in the world.

Snape was losing it big time, he was raving and ranting while waving a copy of the Prophet in Dumbledore’s face. “Albus I demand you do something about these malicious slurs printed here, the Potter brat and his mudblood bitch should never have been allowed to leave the castle.”

Before Albus could answer, Minerva’s calm voice fanned the flames of Snape’s temper tantrum, “Professor Snape, using language like that is a serious breach of professional etiquette, the fact that it’s in front of students leaves me with no option but to administer an official reprimand. Personally, for a head of house to use such words in reference to students turns my stomach. I find Mr Potter’s descriptions of what happened here yesterday to be totally accurate. His assessments of some members of staff were also right on the money and I shall be approaching the board with a view to having some such screening system in place in the very near future.”

Severus looked expectantly at the headmaster, awaiting his usual neutralising comments that would save his arse but they never came.

Dumbledore's number one priority was getting the Potters back to Hogwarts, their very public decrying of his potions master left him in a bind. If he supported Severus then the Potters would class Albus in the same bracket, if he didn't then Minerva in her current Minx mode would have Severus suspended before the week was out.

With the Potter situation uppermost in his mind, Minerva was Hogwarts biggest asset while Severus was a liability, for the greater good Snape was going to be abandoned to the lioness.

The greasy haired one couldn't believe this was happening and turned aggressively on McGonagall, "If you start handing out punishments for using the term 'mudblood' then the school will be empty before we reach Halloween!"

She calmly stood and faced the angry professor, "If that's what it takes for people to realise that word isn't acceptable inside Hogwarts then so be it. I can't help but think that there would still be three quarters of the students present, and those missing would all have worn green trim on their robes. Perhaps seeing their head of house receive his second official reprimand for using that despicable term will have a positive effect on them?"

He whirled to Dumbledore, "Are you just going to sit there and let her get away with this?"

Dumbledore's answer was calm and measured, "Professor McGonagall is acting within the parameters of her role as Deputy Headmistress. Should you wish to challenge her recent decisions then that would be by tribunal in front of the school board. Please inform me if you chose that option and I shall make arrangements so it can take place."

Snape stormed out the hall, ignoring the sniggering coming from three of the house tables.

He didn't appear for lunch and had to be summoned when Amelia turned up with a couple of aurors and demanded to speak with the senior staff. The meeting convened in Dumbledore's office.

Amelia threw in some general questions to get the ball rolling, "First of all, I would like to determine just how accurate the description of yesterdays events that appeared in the Prophet actually is. Secondly, what steps are being taken to insure it doesn't happen again."

Severus couldn't believe how they were all shitting themselves because Prince Potter threw a hissy fit. "The brat broke the rules and should be left to rot, Hogwarts should not be making exceptions for pampered Princes who turn up with a wife in tow. Let them stew, they'll come crawling back."

Amelia could see Harry's description of this vile man fitted him to a T. "Some of my aurors were called to the Leaky Cauldron this morning where the Potters were being mobbed by well-wishers. They were making their way into the Alley to find information about Magical schools in Australia."

Snape's sneer was on full power, "I can't understand why you're all buying into this. He's playing with you."

Amelia shook her head in dismay at this professors antics, she was so glad Susan had been sorted into Hufflepuff. "I had a couple of muggle born aurors do a little investigating into the Grangers. They are a very well thought of and respected family, who this morning filed papers in the muggle world so they would become Harry's legal guardians. They also put their very successful business up for sale, the word is they're looking to leave the country. Both are dentists, a form of muggle healers, and would be considered extremely well educated and reasonably wealthy in their world. The chances of this being a bluff are zero so please answer my questions."

Albus was too shocked by these revelations, he'd thought to give them time to cool down before orchestrating an approach. This was time he apparently no longer had.

Minerva answered the waiting Amelia, "I'm ashamed to say the events described are very accurate, internal steps have been taken to insure it will never happen again. I have also contacted a former student with the view to making him a security consultant. Working

alongside Hagrid as keeper of the keys, they would be responsible for ensuring that people can no longer just breeze into Hogwarts.”

This raised Dumbledore’s eyebrow, “May I ask who Minerva?” Those may have been the words he used but his tone clearly added ‘after all I am the headmaster’.

“Remus Lupin.”

Dumbledore almost smiled, this was a brilliant idea. He could visualise Harry and his wife having tea with Remus and Hagrid, chatting away about his parents. This was what he needed, a way to create an emotional tie to Hogwarts. “An outstanding idea Minerva, if I can be of any help persuading Remus, please don’t hesitate to ask.”

Snape had had enough, “Your going to employ a werewolf in the hope of enticing Potter back, the parents will never stand for it!”

McGonagall went for the jugular, “Well they didn’t complain about us hiring a death eater. Unlike you, Mr Lupin did not choose to be a werewolf and his affliction only affects him one night a month. If you feel so strongly about this I will of course accept your resignation now, after all you are only one reprimand away from being suspended. I could perfectly understand you not wanting that indignity on your permanent record.”

He went to storm out the room, only to find his dramatic exit being blocked by a pair of aurors. “May I leave now?” Severus asked Amelia.

“Oh I think I’ve seen all I need to of you for the moment professor.” Both aurors moved aside and Snape was soon slithering out the door as Amelia continued. “Ok let’s deal with the school stuff first. Mrs Weasley has admitted running up to the boy with the intention of grabbing him, was that your impression Minerva?”

“She appeared ready to throttle the boy, if Mrs Potter hadn’t reacted so quickly that’s what probably would have happened.”

Albus tried to calm things down, "I'm sure she was just overwrought, if Harry doesn't press charges the whole thing will blow over."

Amelia thought the old man had it seriously wrong this time, she decided to try and get him off-balance, "Albus, sitting behind these castle walls has made you insular to what's happening in the rest of our world. Rightly or wrongly the public think of this boy as their saviour, there has been outrage today and I'm surprised you haven't been inundated with howlers."

He gave a weak smile, "The elves deal with any that are sent to staff."

"Well Molly Weasley has been receiving them by the flock, she even got injured when someone sent her a booby-trapped one. The minister is going nuts and Arthur has already effectively been sacked. People are crying in the streets Albus, this is not going to blow over. He's insisting I contact the Potters today, Fudge was going to go himself until Malfoy pointed out it would look as if the minister of magic was grovelling."

Albus pounced on this, "Perhaps Minerva could accompany you, she's already met the parents and spoken with both Potters. It could help break the ice, rather than a stranger just turning up on their doorstep."

"Perhaps, since you mentioned doorstep Albus, I want to get to the bottom of why a baby was left abandoned on one. Any ideas?" Amelia watched with interest as the colour drained from Dumbledore, while Minerva couldn't even look at Amelia and actually lowered her head. It would seem they had more than an idea of what happened that night.

-oOoOo-

Dan Granger had quite a day and it would seem that it wasn't over yet, he'd just opened the front door to discover the doorbell had been rung by Professor McGonagall and another woman he didn't know.

“ Good evening Mr Granger, may we speak with Harry and Hermione please?”

Dan's temper flared, “Why the hell should I let you anywhere near the kids? I was assured Hermione would be perfectly safe in that school of yours. Care to explain how she turned up here yesterday after being attacked, married to another eleven-year-old and both of them were left to travel down from Scotland on their own? Just a good job we know Harry for the outstanding young man that he is. If this is your idea of the correct way to treat children placed in your care then I'm very glad they're out of there.”

“Excuse me Mr Granger, My name is Amelia Bones, head of magical law enforcement. I'm here to investigate a complaint that Mr Potter made against his attacker, it was he who contacted me regarding this matter. I apologise if the timing is inconvenient but I'm required by law to follow up on this complaint.”

Grudgingly Dan invited the women into the Granger home, neither could fail to notice the brochures and magical school prospectuses that Emma and the two children were poring over in their lounge. The fact that Harry moved to place himself between them and his wife was also glaringly obvious, there wasn't a lot of trust being displayed by the males present.

“ Professor McGonagall? I thought we'd seen the last of you yesterday. Now I've left Hogwarts I get the visit I should have gotten in the first place? The magical world sure does things backward.”

Minerva was saved from answering by Amelia introducing herself before getting to the reason she was here, “Mr Potter, the lady in question has admitted ‘attempting to grab you’. Should you wish to press charges she would face a hefty financial penalty. The decision is of course yours.”

One quick glance to Hermione was all it took, “Madam Bones, I wish to press charges.”

This really surprised Minerva, “Mr Potter, the Weasleys are a poor family. The father has been sacked from the ministry because of this, their eldest son was also summoned back from Egypt and fired by the goblins. They are currently trying to sell the land they own, hoping to make enough money to leave the country. A large fine would in all probability bankrupt them. Are you sure you want to do this?”

“Professor had that redheaded boy who attacked Hermione actually laid a finger on my wife then I would have killed him. Since finding out from Neville there was so much that we didn’t know, we hit the bookshop. I have since discovered I would have legally been within my rights as well. If people think the Potters are a soft target then they will treat us as such, by doing this we are sending out a signal that we are not to be messed with. Please understand I have here what I’ve longed for my whole life, my family was taken from me once and I swear that will never happen again. I will do anything to protect my family.”

The passion and power in Harry’s words belied his eleven years. While Amelia and Minerva thought he was talking about his parents, his family understood what he meant. Hermione wrapped him in a hug, “Our family Harry, I’ll be beside you every step of the way love.”

Any other boy this age threatening to kill someone would have Amelia chuckling to herself, not this one though. It was in his eyes, the boy was no killer but wouldn’t hesitate if it was to protect those he loved. Yes she believed Harry Potter would have hit the Weasley boy with everything that he had. Since he had incapacitated the Weasley twins then who knew what other surprises he had up his sleeve. He was also correct that ruining the Weasleys would make others hesitate before messing with the Potters. It was now time to pop the question that Fudge had given her a direct order to ask.

“Mr and Mrs Potter, I have been directed by the minister of magic to ask if there was any consideration we could make to halt your decision to leave the country.”

Harry focused his full gaze on both women, “I used to lie in my cupboard and think that the hunger was making me hallucinate. I

could hear a man shout at my mother to take me and run, she didn't but pleaded with someone to kill her instead of me. A maniacal laugh was followed by a flash of green light and my mother was gone. If I mentioned it to my relatives it earned me a beating, and flung back in the cupboard for another couple of days. They called me freak and, with no knowledge of magic I honestly thought I was one."

They had discussed where he was going to go with this but Hermione could see Harry's emotions were still pretty raw, Emma now had both of them in a hug as the memories evoked had the tears flowing freely.

"I remember a flying motorbike and a man with black hair, he was not my father but loved me very much. I have read and read before finally uncovering this person's identity. I want to be at Sirius Black's trial, look him in the eye while he's under truth serum and ask him why he betrayed my parents. Consigning them to die, and me to a living hell with my relatives."

Minerva couldn't have been more shocked if someone had stuck an electric cattle prod up her arse, they'd abandoned that baby to a life he himself described as hell. Amelia had tore Dumbledore to shreds on his admission that it was he who left Harry on that doorstep. She promised him that her department would investigate this meticulously and she herself would push for charges to be brought against him.

Minerva also had a question to ask, "Do you think there is anyway you could give Hogwarts another chance?"

Emma's grip tightened on her children, "Why the hell should they? We've spent the evening looking at some wonderful schools on the other side of the world, personally I still don't think that's far enough away from the people who allowed Harry to be treated like this."

Amelia had what she came for and didn't think there was anything to be gained by arguing with these people, probably because she agreed with them. "Mr Potter I shall pass on your request to the minister, hopefully we'll be in touch."

Dan gave them a timeline to work with, "We plan on travelling to Australia, checking out some schools and areas to live before finally

making the move. If things proceed the way we hope, by this time next week our family could be on a plane headed for distant shores.”

She could only nod, these people had a right to live their own life and were breaking no laws. If they wanted to leave the country then legally they were powerless to stop them.

Both witches apparated away to audible sighs of relief, “Sorry folks, I got quite lost in the moment there.” Harry received kisses from both Hermione and Emma, no words were needed.

“Do you think they’ll give your godfather a trial?” Dan asked.

“I hope so, it was the best we could come up with until getting our hands on a certain rat. Now there’s something I need to ask you all, how would you like to stay in Devon?”

Hermione sussed what he was up to but didn’t understand the reason behind it, “Harry, why would you buy the Burrow?”

“Well I thought my wife might like to destroy it, blast the house apart and set the ruins on fire to watch it burn. Then you two ladies could design the house of your dreams, swimming pool, library, gym, Quidditch pitch? Whatever you want. A team of magical builders would have it completed well before Christmas, of course we would have to invite the neighbours over during the holidays...”

Harry never got to say anymore as Hermione was kissing him. Emma couldn’t help but smile at this, “Ok it’s pretty obvious that Hermione loves the idea but perhaps you could explain it to us.”

“Mum what my brilliant husband here didn’t get around to mentioning is that our nearest neighbours would be the Lovegoods.”

“And the Diggorys,” added Harry.

Thanks for reading.

Chapter 5

A big black dog was sleeping curled on a filthy threadbare blanket, it raised its ears without lifting its head or even opening its eyes. The dog was suddenly transformed into a man who appeared every bit as mangy as the dog he'd just replaced. Sirius Black stood in his cell and stretched, it was a rare occasion when the Dementors were withdrawn and one not to be missed.

The wizard didn't open his eyes, there was nothing to see that he hadn't memorised years ago. Counting the bricks that make up your cell walls gets old nearly as fast as counting the days to your trial that never comes. All that was left now was to savour being human without the Dementors messing with your head, without Padfoot he didn't think he would have survived this long.

His eyes soon sprung wide open when he heard multiple footsteps approaching his cell door, even more shockingly it began to open.

"Ok Black, you're coming with us. No funny business or we'll just knock you out and drag your worthless arse out of here."

Sirius hadn't used his voice in a while but discovered it still worked, "Where are you taking me?"

"Well it would appear Harry Potter found out who was responsible for his parent's deaths, now he wants to spit in your eye before Fudge hands you over to a Dementor. This is your last day on this Earth scumbag."

Sirius was struggling to stay upright with all the shocks coming his way, he knew he had to though or they literally would drag him out of here. The guards didn't carry wands in case the prisoners got hold of them so he would be dragged out by the ankles and his head would hit every stone step in Azkaban. They placed a medallion around his neck that signified he was off-limits to the Dementors, it didn't repel them, just emitted an aura that marked the prisoner for safe passage.

Sirius almost broke down when he was being led out the prison, heading towards the dock he got his first glimpse of the night sky. The stars were beautiful and there had been a distinct lack of beauty in his life for the last decade. Sirius felt a great weight lift off him as the boat sailed away from the island, even if this was his last night it was still better than rotting in that hell. What was running through his mind though was Sirius Black was going to get to see Harry Potter, now Sirius thought that was worth dying for.

-oOoOo-

Arthur and Bill entered the Burrow as the sea of expectant faces tried to read their mood, this proved very difficult as neither was sure what to feel at the moment. They all sat around the kitchen table with only Charlie missing, dragon handlers didn't have the same penalty clauses in their contracts that the goblins insisted on. A wizard working for Gringotts had to be above reproach, the faintest hint of scandal could see you lose your job. Having it splashed all over the front page of the papers that your mother tried to attack the boy who lived was always going to result in an instant dismissal.

Molly couldn't wait any longer, "Well, what happened?"

Arthur reported the latest news to his family, "We've sold the land, for a lot more gold than I expected but we have to be out of here before the weekend."

Molly tried to make the best of it, "At least we'll have some gold at our backs, we can be packed in no time."

Bill was shaking his head, "The new owners are going to tear everything down and build from scratch."

Again Molly tried to look on the bright side, though she had unshed tears in her eyes at the impending destruction of her home. "We always knew whoever bought the land wouldn't want the house, it stands to reason. At least now we'll be able to get a good start somewhere else."

It was Arthur who dropped the bombshell, "The Potter boy is pressing charges against you, we'll lose over half the gold in fines."

Molly let the tears go, "Couldn't we fight this?"

Arthur knew they didn't have a hope, Molly had admitted her crime to the head of the DMLE. "All that would achieve would be to give our remaining gold to some lawyer, we just have to take it on the chin and get on with it as best we can."

"I'd like to put one on that little bastard's chin, him and that trollop..." Molly's tirade was abruptly ended by a fuming Arthur Weasley.

"That's what got us into this mess in the first place! Your stupid bloody temper and pig-headedness have already cost Bill and me our jobs, as well as almost making this family destitute. I swear if you cause one more bit of trouble for us I will not hesitate to cast you out, we have a family crisis here and don't have any time for your tantrums."

This shocked the entire clan into silence, not even Molly had ever seen Arthur like this, the angry head of the Weasley family continued in the same vein. "Percy, Fred, George, you will be returning to Hogwarts."

Percy wanted to object but his father's tone had left him in no doubt that would not be a wise decision, he just nodded his head in acceptance. The twins were smiling as Arthur turned his gaze to his youngest son, "Ron, I'll give you a choice, return to Hogwarts or be home schooled by your Auntie Muriel?"

Home schooled was on his lips until his father threw in who would be doing the schooling, Ron desperately wanted to ask why he couldn't stay with his mother but, since that wasn't an option offered, he would just have to assume that it wasn't possible. His father didn't appear to be in the mood to answer questions. Slytherin or his Auntie Muriel was a tough choice, in the end there was only one way he could go, "Hogwarts."

Arthur's eyes then shifted to his daughter and his expression softened for the first time today, "I'm really sorry princess but I don't have any options to offer you. Your Auntie Muriel is going to be looking after you until we can get settled somewhere. Bill has some contacts in a few countries where we can hopefully find work."

The tears were streaming down her cheeks as she asked, "Why can't I come with you?"

"We have four of you in Hogwarts and need to set-up a new home abroad, it's going to take me, Bill and your mum all working full time just to make ends meet. The Burrow may not have been much but it was ours, anything else we get is going to cost us rent or mortgage."

Arthur turned his attention back towards his sons to deliver a warning, and also because watching Ginny cry was breaking his heart. "I have no idea what the situation will be at Hogwarts but if the Potters are there you lot will be on your best behaviour. They have done nothing and acted entirely within the law, this family can't afford to take one more hit. A story in the press about vindictive Weasleys picking on two first years would end any hope we have of recovering, do I make myself clear?"

Arthur made sure he got a 'yes dad' out the four of them, he didn't want to imagine what would happen if the twins started to prank them or Percy drew his wand again. They would probably have to dye their hair blond and change their name to get a job tending camels in the Sahara!

Arthur walked outside, heading for his hut to get one last look at his muggle plugs and batteries collection. This also meant he didn't have to look at his wife, in all the years of marriage he'd come closest to strangling her today. Having been married to Molly for over twenty years, that was really saying something.

-oOoOo-

Harry and Hermione stepped off the Knight Bus at the public entrance to the ministry of magic, they had received some strange glances and a few glares from the other passengers but Harry was sure their

chosen apparel was responsible for that. He was wearing a dark suit Hermione had picked for him and, with a shirt and tie Harry was dressed as the quintessential muggle. His wife was also paying no heed to the fact that they were probably going to meet the Minister of Magic today, a pale blue dress with a dark blue jacket was rounded off by matching bag and shoes. Only the wand hidden in a holster on her arm signified she was a witch, they were making no concessions to the magical world, and if they didn't like it, tough!

Both couldn't help but think the ministry hadn't concerned themselves too much with what clothes the pair were wearing the last time they 'visited' this building, the bastards were too busy making sure they both got kissed. Hermione understood how emotional this was going to be for Harry, she had been relieved to go first as watching the kiss being administered to Harry would have been worse than the actual deed itself. Add to that he was going to see Sirius again and his emotions were off the scale, she just hoped he didn't do anything reckless. Then again he wouldn't be Harry Potter and the man / boy she loved without that reckless streak, she would just have to be on alert and, as always cover his back.

They arrived at the desk and the guard asked for his wand, when Harry replied he didn't have one the shocked guard waved them through. Two of the aurors from the Leaky Cauldron were there to once more provide an escort, this time to courtroom ten.

Hermione was certain controlling her husband was a lost cause the moment they entered, there was the chair, complete with chains that they had personal experience of. The dementor in the corner waited quietly behind its containment field, it knew it was going to be fed today but there was even worse to come. The panel of five contained not only Dumbledore but Dolores Umbridge, Hermione was fighting the urge to go down there and kill the bitch herself so Merlin knew what Harry was thinking.

Harry's face was contorted with anger, fortunately most folk thought this was due to his impending meeting with the betrayer of his parents. Unfortunately a certain toad just couldn't keep her mouth shut, "I find it insulting that these two children can appear before us in

this disrespectful manner of dress, surely some robes can be found for them.”

Harry was on his feet while Hermione’s hands were in her lap, her wand handle already in her grasp. “I was denied knowledge of who I was for ten years, perhaps you should be looking into who carried out that deed rather than concerning yourself with what my wife and I are wearing. Fashion tips from someone wearing a hideous pink cardigan? Please!”

Harry sat back down but a clearly upset toad could hear the sniggering all around her and wouldn’t let it go, “Mr Potter, I am Dolores Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister for Magic. I will not be spoken to in that manner by a mere boy.”

Harry stood slowly, knowing every eye was on him. Dumbledore was watching keenly and he’d noticed McGonagall, incredibly accompanied by Remus in the public box. The Hogwarts approach must also be coming today so he thought he’d better make it look good. “I am Lord Harry James Potter, last scion of the Noble and Ancient House of Potter, banisher of the Dark Lord Voldemort. Who the fuck are you to call me boy? If you’re insulted then I offer you the chance to duel, before or after you bring out Black. Either way, can we get on with this, I didn’t think anyone could procrastinate worse than Dumbledore but it seems I might be wrong.”

The toad wouldn’t give it up though, “If the fiction in the press is to be believed, I understand you have no wand. How do you purpose to duel?”

Harry gave her a predatory smile, “I didn’t have a wand when I defeated Voldemort!” the gasps at the name again gave him the opening that he was looking for, “What? You think I blasted him with a bad pair of nappies?”

Dumbledore couldn’t resist, “And just how did you defeat him Lord Potter?”

“Perhaps had I not been in effect banished from the magical world for ten years I might be inclined to tell you, as it is I owe you nothing!”

Professor McGonagall called out from the public gallery, "Lord Potter, I have your wand here, we were able to repair it at the castle."

Hermione summoned it directly into her husband's hand as Harry gave their favourite professor a slight bow, "Thank you Professor, it would seem I might have some use for it after all."

Amelia was so enjoying the toad getting stepped on and anytime Dumbledore didn't get his own way made her day. It was time to move proceedings on, though she would be more than interested in how the toad tried to squirm her way out of the duel. Harry had made it quite plain he wished to discourage attacks on his family, taking down Fudge's hatchet woman would certainly do that. For some reason she never doubted Harry would win. "Bring in the prisoner!"

Sirius entered the room with an auror holding each arm, he was frantically searching the faces for one in particular, hoping beyond hope he would recognise Harry. That should never have been in question as an eleven-year-old James stared back at him with Lily's eyes. Sirius had expected to see hate reflected there, instead it was like drinking the world's strongest pepper-up potion with a fire whisky chaser. There was unbelievably, yet unmistakably love reflected there and Sirius Black felt ten feet tall as energy surged through his body. He shook off the aurors and marched straight to the chair, sitting down without once taking his eyes off Harry.

After the chains wrapped around him the head of the DMLE stepped forward, "Sirius Orion Black, you are charged..."

She was interrupted by the Marauder, "About bloody time Amelia, I plead not guilty." He then stuck his tongue out as the sparkle that was such a feature of his youth made a tentative return to his eyes.

It took a matter of minutes of his answers to result in the chamber descending into chaos, Umbridge was banging on the table in an attempt to restore order, she would have had more luck dancing on top of it. It was Amelia who restored a semblance of order before toad face interrupted her, "How is it possible that Black can overcome the truth serum?"

Harry was up so fast you could have sworn he was spring loaded, "Why is it Miss Under-the-Minister that the ministry was so quick to believe 'I was under the Imperius' while dismissing evidence that's right in front of your eyes? Doesn't this fit in with your plans or am I supposed to pay someone off to get my innocent godfather out of Azkaban?" A mouse fart could have been heard in the absolute silence that followed that remark. Harry removed a letter from inside his jacket and offered it to Amelia, "My mother wrote that so I want it back! It was in my family vault and explains that my parents switched secret keepers. This seemed the quickest way to get my godfather free, to be perfectly honest the only person I trust in this room is sitting by my side."

Harry gave Amelia a moment to scan the letter before asking, "Since my godfather is here and still under truth serum, could we ask him what happened that night?"

Dumbledore objected immediately, "I hardly think that's necessary..."

Harry expected nothing less and interrupted him, "Madam Bones, my godfather will of course tell me but I feel it should be on public record, rather than second hand from another Prophet interview that some people will question the validity of." His eyes were boring into the toad as he said this, "I think the greater good of the magical world would be served if the facts were learned here today."

Dumbledore reacted as if he'd been physically slapped, not helped by the fact that Amelia agreed with Potter and began asking questions he didn't want answered.

Sirius began telling the story of that fateful Halloween, "I felt uneasy all day so went to check-up on Peter, only to find him missing. This really had me worried so I headed immediately for Godric's Hollow. There I found the door blasted off and my brother in all but blood lying dead inside, I heard someone coming down the stairs and had my wand out ready to kill, it was Hagrid and he had Harry cradled in his arms. I told him I would take Harry but he refused, he had orders from Dumbledore and I knew where his loyalty lay so offered him my motorbike. I kissed Harry goodbye and went after Peter." The drug

was wearing off now but Sirius had waited a long time to say this and had no intention of stopping, the chamber was so enthralled that no attempt to stop him speaking was even considered, never mind made.

“I spent many nights lying in Azkaban wondering how different my life would be if I hadn’t let Hagrid take him, only the thought of Harry being happy allowed me to survive all those years, I knew James and Lily had made detailed provisions for him. Why did no one even question me? I was stunned in the street and woke up in that cell in Azkaban, I was an auror and knew that wasn’t the way things were supposed to happen.”

Harry could see his godfather was now totally free of the drug’s effects, “Sirius, I ended up with the Dursleys!”

Only the chains still holding him to the chair prevented Sirius attacking Dumbledore, “What the fuck were you thinking of? You signed their wills as a witness along with me, it specifically stated he was never to go there as they hated magic.”

Harry removed a scroll out his jacket and offered it to Amelia, “This is a copy of my parents will, it lists yourself and Professor McGonagall by name as just some of the trustworthy people I should have went to instead. We met Susan briefly in Hogwarts and I would really have liked to have a sister while growing up.” He turned to Dumbledore, “We have the how and who, would you care to tell us why?”

Dumbledore actually squirmed, “I had my reasons but don’t wish to go into them here and now.”

Harry didn’t think there was a chance in hell Dumbledore would disclose the prophecy here, he liked his secrets and had kept everything to himself before but this time they already knew most of them. “Very well then, the Noble and Ancient Houses of Potter and Black?” Harry looked towards his godfather to see if it was alright to include him in this.

“Oh hell yes! Let’s hit the old bastard with everything we can.”

“Potter and Black will pursue this matter legally, politically and financially to the full extent we are able. Who the fuck gave you the right to make decisions regarding my life?”

“Your mother and father were friends of mine...”

“Were friends!” screamed Sirius, “You better pray they don’t have wands in the afterlife Albus, or Lily Potter will transfigure you into a flobberworm for giving her boy to Petunia. Whatever possessed you to do something that was not only criminal but insane?”

“Madam Bones, can I ask why my innocent godfather is still in chains while Dumbledore is clearly guilty of breaking the law yet sits there on a judging panel?”

Amelia for once wasn’t sure how to proceed, “Sirius Orion Black, you were never actually charged with any crimes so the ministry can’t grant you a pardon, all I can do is exonerate you from any wrong doing and set you free. There will be a full public enquiry into why this happened, you have suffered ten years in Azkaban and this will not be swept under the carpet.”

The chains fell away and Harry was out of his seat in a flash, Sirius had barely time to stand before Harry had his arms around him. Both of them were barely holding back the tears until Harry pulled away, “There is someone you need to meet.”

Hermione was now by his side, “This is Hermione Potter, my wife.”

Sirius glanced at the girl before noticing the Potter ring on her finger, next second they were both hugging the confused marauder. He was beginning to wonder if he was still lying in his cell having finally lost his mind, this seemed to be confirmed by his godson’s next actions.

“Excuse me a minute Sirius, Madam Umbitch, are you prepared to apologise?”

Dolores was not having a good morning, the minister was standing outside with the press, waiting on the Potters leaving to have his

picture taken with them. Everyone expected Black to be found guilty and kissed, when he walks out that door all hell was going to break loose. She let her temper get the better of her, "I have no intention of apologising to a little half-blood upstart like you. I will duel you anytime, anywhere."

Harry whipped off his jacket and handed it to Hermione, as he was loosening his tie he called her bluff. "Here and now works for me, I'm sure these kind people would act as witnesses for us."

Dumbledore thought it would be good for the Potter boy to learn some humility, he began erecting duelling shields as Harry was rolling up his sleeves.

Sirius was not amused, "Harry, this is nuts and I won't allow it."

"Sorry Sirius but only my wife is allowed to tell me that."

Hermione gave him a quick kiss, "Remember Harry, it's pronounced stoo-puh-fye."

Sirius was about to say something more when he spied the gleam in Harry's eyes, James used to look like that just before he pranked you. Sirius was beginning to believe these two might actually know what they were doing, after all he was a free man now.

When Harry replied, "Thanks love, it was the wand movement that gave me the trouble though." Sirius was sure. He went from being utterly terrified to just worried sick as Harry's wife led them to where they had been sitting.

Dolores bought the whole act and was feeling supremely confident, handing Potter his arse in front of everyone here would soon put an end to this 'chosen one' nonsense. It would also look great on her CV.

Amelia was going over the rules but Harry wasn't listening, while in Australia Dan had introduced him to the game of pool. He'd picked it up so fast Dan used to jokingly accuse him of using the cue like a wand to perform magic. Here was his chance to put the toad in the corner pocket.

When Amelia gave the signal, the toad started firing curse after curse. Harry quickly placed her as their worst ever DADA professor, considering they'd had Gilderoy that was some achievement. She just stood there without moving, continually firing with most of her spells off target anyway. Harry was constantly on the move, lining up his perfect shot.

Dolores was having fun, the little boy looked scared shitless. He hadn't even fired a spell at her, that was before his wand appeared to burst into action and she barely got her shield up.

When Harry got into the right position, he unleashed a barrage of spells, four stupefies and an expelliarmus in as many seconds. The first two Stupefies impacted on her shield, the third one shattered it before the forth one ended the duel. The expelliarmus whipped her wand out her hand and flung her violently backwards, she bounced off Dumbledore's duelling ward straight and true, right into the Dementor's containment shield.

The very nature of the shield was to contain the Dementor while allowing the condemned prisoners to pass through unhindered, Dolores sailed right through the shield into death's waiting arms. The Dementor was well aware anything passing through the shield belonged to it, Dolores was being kissed before anyone had time to react.

Trying to get Dolores away from the Dementor was a bit like trying to take a juicy bone off a pit bull, when it finally let go, Dolores Umbridge was no more.

Dumbledore was livid, "See what your reckless cavalier attitude has caused, you have that woman's death on your conscience."

Harry could quite happily live with that but wasn't prepared to show it here, "Well personally I blame whoever erected the duelling shields, how could you miss something dangerous that's over nine feet tall and standing in the corner. You are either incompetent or were hoping it was going to be me that ended up in there? You seem to have a habit of blaming others for your mistakes, the head of the

DMLE can verify I fired nothing but stunners and a disarming hex, why didn't you shield that area?"

Harry's plan had formed the instant he'd noticed that the old goat hadn't shielded the Dementor, as far as he was concerned the toad got exactly what she deserved. The vicious and cruel witch had forced him to watch as Hermione had her soul sucked out, payback was a bitch!

Harry was engulfed by bushy brown hair as Hermione pounced on him, Sirius had the good graces to wait until they had finished kissing before smacking Harry on the back of the head. "Don't do that to me again, you just took years off my life. You were bloody brilliant though!"

"I'm merely brilliant, my wife here is the brains of the family. She's a genius."

Sirius pulled the both of them into a hug, "Just like your parents, your dad was clever but your mother was, well scary."

"Eh Sirius, don't take this the wrong way but you seriously need a bath! You're coming home with us, Hermione's dad is about the same size as you and we can go shopping tomorrow."

Amelia approached them, "Lord Potter I agree with your assessment of the situation, poorly erected duelling wards led to the unfortunate accident that happened here. I was really impressed by your performance, can I ask if you had a duelling strategy?"

"Ma'am I got the impression the woman was a bully so decided to let her tire by throwing curses before using any of my own. The stupefies were to break her shield allowing the disarming hex to do its job, her shield was weaker than I thought it would be."

Amelia could see the chosen one living up to the reputation that had built up over the years he'd been missing, the lad's claim that his wife

was even better was just plain terrifying. "I have some bad news for you, Minister Fudge is waiting outside with the press to ambush you."

Harry put his tie back on and was reaching for his jacket when Hermione asked a question, "What would the head of the DMLE say was the best way to spring an ambush?"

Amelia's eyes nearly popped out her head, "Reverse the ambush, Fudge won't know what hit him!"

Hermione took one of Sirius's arms while Harry had the other, "Oh I'm betting he'll know what hit him, he just won't be able to do anything about it!"

Harry was smiling at his wife, "Didn't I tell you she was brilliant, let's get this show on the road."

As they walked through the doors, Fudge proved himself the consummate politician. While his insides were turning to liquid at the sight of Sirius still alive, the smile never left his face as the Potter's and Black headed straight for him. His ability to keep that smile in place was seriously tested by Harry Potter.

Harry approached, all smiles with his hand held out to shake, "Minister Fudge, I'm delighted to meet the man who set in motion the process that found my godfather innocent. That your head of DMLE immediately announced a full public enquiry into why he was denied a trial just indicates what an inspirational leader you are."

The cameras were flashing as Harry Potter shook his hand and praised his leadership, Cornelius could feel his popularity rating rising with every shake, his political ardour was soon quenched though by the next statement.

"I would like to offer my condolences to the family and friends of Madam Umbridge, she duelled with honour and only the poorly erected duelling wards of Professor Dumbledore saw her life tragically ended by a Dementor. It has emerged this is the same man who left me on a muggle doorstep and was the Supreme Mugwump

who allowed an innocent man to rot in Azkaban for ten years without a trial. Is it any wonder my wife and I left Hogwarts?"

Hermione had a tight grip on Sirius, with squeezes of his arm and imploring with her eyes, she kept him quiet for now. She could see Sirius had a million questions for later though.

Harry finished with the kicker, "All I can say is thank Merlin we have Minister Fudge at the helm, our faith in him is causing my wife and I to reconsider our decision to leave the country. With him in charge I know action will be taken against those who broke the law, denying me my heritage and my godfather his freedom."

They made to leave until one of the press shouted a question, "Mr Black, what will you be doing now you're free?"

Sirius just couldn't pass up an opportunity like that, "I have been in a cell for ten years, allowed no contact with the outside world. For all I know death eater Lucius Malfoy might even have squirmed his way to freedom. I intend to catch up with my godson and his charming wife, I know you'll respect my privacy while we take time to get to know each other again." He'd seen the way they'd lapped up the bullshit Harry was serving so dished out some more of his own. Sirius was well aware Lucius had bought his way out of a prison sentence but he had deniability on his side.

They walked away from the press who were now bombarding Fudge with questions and straight into Minerva and Remus. Both men stared at each other for a moment before throwing themselves at one another, one arm manly hugs soon gave way to the real thing. "Sorry I believed you could betray them Sirius."

"Remus we thought you were the spy and that's why we didn't tell you about the switch. Those were crazy times my friend, though it seems very crazy here today. Harry, this is Remus Lupin, a very good friend of mine and your parents."

"Pleased to meet you sir, this is my wife Hermione?"

Before Remus could say any more, Minerva broke into the conversation. "It's good to see you again Sirius, Mr and Mrs Potter. I heard you say that the decision to leave Britain wasn't finalised yet, would you be prepared to give Hogwarts a second chance?"

It was Hermione who answered, "Professor, this is hardly the time or the place for that conversation. Sirius here looks dead on his feet and we're anxious to get him home. You know where we live, why not drop by later and bring Mr Lupin with you?"

This was more than Minerva had hoped for, "Could I bring Madam Pomfrey along? She's the school healer and could give Sirius an examination while she's there."

Hermione smiled, Sirius should really be going to St Mungo's but neither him or Harry had any time for hospital stays, it was one of the many things they had in common. "That would be fine Professor, now all we have to do is get Sirius Black on the Night Bus."

Amelia came to their rescue and made them a portkey home.

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Albus sat in his Hogwarts office, sucking a lemon drop and wondering just what the hell was going on. He'd spent twenty minutes trying to extract himself from the press who descended on him as he tried to catch hold of the Potters before they left, Minerva being invited to speak with them tonight was the only bright spot he could think of since the first of September.

When he was being asked things like 'why didn't he knock on the door, was he afraid the muggles wouldn't take the baby he illegally left on their doorstep?' Albus knew tomorrow's papers were going to crucify him. After Harry's lavish praise of Cornelius, any thoughts of trying to control the boy through the ministry vanished. With Minerva and Amelia also on Potter's side, Albus was finding himself marginalised as Harry clearly blamed him for his time at the Dursleys.

He was terrified the boy would go dark without his guidance, Harry's lack of remorse at the death of Dolores really worried him, the boy

should have been distraught. He'd used two very simple spells to devastating effect, the lad was obviously very powerful but then so were both his parents. Albus himself was a prodigious seeker of knowledge and both Potters apparently devoured books, having the magical power to match would make them outstanding students.

Albus had another worry, the house elves might deal with the howlers he was sent but the school board read the papers too. If they took the view that the only thing standing between the Potters and their attendance at Hogwarts was its current headmaster, then he would probably find himself out of a job. Harry's comments today could easily be construed as such, and Albus sensed the reporters were out for blood.

With a public enquiry into Black's lack of a trial and questions on his placement of baby Harry coming from all sides, Albus found it hard to believe this had all started with Molly Weasley trying to grab the lad in Kings Cross station.

-oOoOo-

Sirius awoke in an actual bed without a Dementor within a hundred miles of him, after having a light lunch, a heavy duty shower – who knew there could be so many nozzles? - he'd slept wearing borrowed pyjamas in a bed with sheets!

There were clothes waiting on him and he could hear the kids preparing dinner as he got dressed. Hermione's parents arrived home as Sirius was leaving the bedroom and he heard a man's voice ask how it went today.

“Oh better than planned, a certain Umbridge found herself in an embrace with a Dementor and we even managed to blame Dumbledore for it.”

If Harry's answer shocked Sirius, the next bit confused the hell out of him.

“She’s the bastard that thought my daughter was scum and made you watch her die, well done son. I have a very good bottle of malt whiskey that will be getting opened tonight, we can say it’s for Sirius being free but I’m so glad that bitch is dead.”

Sirius made sure to make a noise as he closed the bedroom door and headed down the stairs, he was met by a smiling Hermione who took his arm.

“Sirius, this is my mum and dad, Dan and Emma.”

He shook Dan’s hand before Emma pulled him into a hug, “These two have told us so much about you, it’s a pleasure to finally meet you Sirius.”

Sirius was now sure there was something badly wrong here, “How could they have spoke about me when I haven’t seen Harry since he was a baby and met Hermione for the first time today?”

Emma looked crestfallen, “Oh shit, I’m sorry kids, I told you I would be rubbish at this.”

Harry could see Emma thought she’d let them down and he couldn’t allow that, he wrapped his arms around her waist and chased away all her worries with his first sentence, “It’s ok mum, it was always our intention to tell Sirius, we just wanted to give him a few days to settle in first. We need his help to get into Grimmauld Place. ”

Harry calling her mum for the first time worked better than anything else could and made this a red letter day for Emma Granger.

He turned towards his godfather, “Padfoot, Hermione and I met you and Moony in our third year of Hogwarts. We left before our seventh year as Dumbledore was already dead and we had a job to do. We did that job and finally defeated Voldemort, only for the purebloods to take over the country. That cockroach Malfoy could survive a nuclear holocaust and ended up running the country with Umbitch, Hermione and I were arrested and given to a dementor in that same room we were in today. I was eighteen on my last birthday and in that life I

watched so many people die, including you, Remus, his wife, Dumbledore and my Hermione. We're back in 1991 and this time the good guys are going to watch the right people do the dying."

Sirius was standing there with his mouth hanging open, how did Harry know about Padfoot, Moony and the Black family home? "You're joking, right? Moony married?"

Harry held out his hand and a silver stag shot out, the patronus brought a tear to his godfather's eye. "Sirius, Prongs and I solemnly swear we're up to no good, I refuse to tell you who Remus married but we know where the rat is hiding."

Those were the words that Sirius really wanted to hear, he would believe anything to get his hands on Peter. "Harry, I need a wand!"

A/N the 'nappies' quip comes from my favourite fic, No Thanks by Old-Crow. I was reading it again last week and that comment always makes me laugh, no matter how many times I read it.

Thanks for reading

Chapter 6

Sirius was again lying in the extremely comfortable bed, wearing his borrowed pyjamas, but this time sleep eluded him. Today was in his top ten of happiest days ever but was by an exceedingly wide margin easily the strangest he'd yet lived. The recently amassed information was buzzing around his brain while Poppy's potions and Dan's exquisite single malt pulsed through his body.

Any doubts that this was some massive prank were dispelled by the sight of two eleven-year-olds playing McGonagall like a trout on a fly rod, they would return to Hogwarts on their own terms and Minerva thought it was all her idea.

The only crack in their armour was later that evening when Sirius tried to push for information about who Moony had married, it was obvious to the three adults present that their self-assured act was indeed just that, an act.

"Sirius you have no idea what we're dealing with here, we're trying to make things better but the whole mess could blow up in our faces at any moment. Last time Remus took a lot of convincing that he was worthy of a wife and that she loved him, furry little problem and all. We hope to save both their lives but I also want my godson to be born. Fighting dark lords we can handle but I think it would be safe to say both of us haven't a clue about matchmaking."

Hermione agreed with her husband, "Perhaps Remus having a job two years before the last timeline and you being legally free might build up his confidence enough to the point where he can accept someone young and beautiful could love him."

Sirius was desperate to make a joke about little red riding hood but could see it wouldn't be appreciated, instead he bade them goodnight as the tired twosome headed off to bed. The chat he had with Dan and Emma though was no less revealing.

"What you have to understand Sirius is that they don't need parental figures looking out for them, just providing unconditional love and support." Dan could see he was going to have to explain this

comment so did his best, "We have the distinct advantage of having lived those extra years and knowing the people they were before coming back in time. When Harry and Hermione arrived in Australia they were two broken people, we watched and helped where we could as they slowly put one another back together again. Emma and I already have six months experience fulfilling the support role they need, they've relied on each other for so long that sometimes you can feel like an outsider. It's not anything they do consciously but you don't have to be around them long to see they watch each other's backs in every situation. Harry and Hermione have a relationship built over years of hardship and danger which has made them closer than any other couple I can think of."

Emma tried to help with an example he could relate too, "I assume you know what a mountain troll is?"

Sirius was really confused where that question was leading but nodded his confirmation anyway.

"Only a couple of months after starting Hogwarts, one of those creatures had Hermione trapped in a girl's bathroom and was determined to kill our little girl. Harry jumped on its back and stuck his wand up its nose to distract it away from her and they've been inseparable ever since. Don't think for one second that Hermione wouldn't do the same for him, that is the kind of commitment they have for one another and it's grown since then as they got older. Some of the stories they could tell you would turn your hair white."

Emma now had tears in her eyes and Dan's arm around her shoulders, "Harry has stood by our daughter through nightmares you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy, he's killed to protect her and will do so again. That bitch he dealt with this morning was the one who had tortured him at Hogwarts before sentencing them both to death. We listened by phone as they were arrested and I was a basket case, Harry was forced to sit there in restraints while they legally murdered the woman he'd just married. There will be no tears cried in this house for that evil bitch, I would have killed her myself given half a chance."

Sirius was left wondering just what role there was left for him to play in their lives, which was why he was unable to sleep. He was now a free man and able to make good on his promise to James and Lily, only to discover his eleven-year-old godson was not only married but had already defeated the monster that murdered his parents before returning back in time.

The pair had also told him that their plans would see Peter 'ratted out' next week, they refused any details but promised he would be there at his capture so Sirius had to settle for that.

Their grins when Minerva gave them the news that the Weasleys would also be returning to Hogwarts were nothing short of feral, all four refused to explain it later, though Harry's comment of 'they're our Wormtail' silenced the marauder. He knew what it was like to suffer the betrayal of a friend, if this indeed was the position of the Weasleys then Sirius wasn't going to say a word in their defence. In his mind Wormtail was going to die for his betrayal of James and Lily, he couldn't imagine what the Weasleys had done to be classed the same but all four clearly thought the comparison was a fair one.

Sirius had another problem, Moony had found himself a wife that the Potters clearly approved of. All the information he could gleam was that she was young, beautiful and bore Remus a son before both parents died fighting evil. He considered himself the most handsome, sophisticated and suave of the marauders. Sirius Orion Black, witch magnet, would not be last in the wife and family stakes. He was going to have to pull his bloody finger out and find the witch of his dreams soon.

-oOoOo-

In Hogwarts castle a certain headmaster was also having trouble sleeping, Minerva's news that she'd convinced the Potters to return was very welcome. The conditions they were imposing, while not unexpected were decidedly less welcome news to Albus Dumbledore.

That they refused to have potions taught to them by Severus was always going to be the case, given their very public decrying of the professor Albus expected nothing less. Black's apparent suggestion

of a replacement almost brought a chuckle to the old wizard, he couldn't imagine Horace would reject an invitation to be the personal potions tutor to the boy who lived. Just the thought of being able to add Harry Potter and his young wife to his 'Slug Club' portfolio would see him beating a path to the Potter's door.

Minerva had also added accommodation at Hogwarts to sweeten the offered employment package. His deputy was obviously thinking it would be prudent to have a replacement already in the castle for when Severus eventually stepped over the very harsh line she was taking with him.

No it was the clause where they would only deal with their head of house, rather than the headmaster that really stuck in his craw. How was he supposed to start building a mentor relationship with the boy if Albus was specifically banned from contact with him?

Minerva left him no wiggle room with the description of what she found at the Grangers, the entire family studying prospectuses of Australian magical schools that the goblins had provided them with. She left Albus in no doubt what would happen if he interfered, or who would be shouldering the blame should they leave Britain. With the minister of magic as their new 'best friend', the headmaster understood he wouldn't survive the fallout if he was the one who hounded the Potters out the country. He wasn't totally sure he would survive the backlash of today's revelations at the ministry.

He was losing allies at an alarming rate, Severus and the Weasleys were damaged beyond repair, Minerva and Amelia were clearly on the side of the Potters while the young couple's endorsement of Cornelius left them practically untouchable at the ministry. Their backing of the minister and his administration would mean Fudge moving Heaven and Earth to retain that golden endorsement. This not only stripped Albus of allies but left him standing alone as a target for the public's anger, he didn't need Sibyll's tea leaves to accurately predict tomorrow was going to be very bad.

-oOoOo-

Lucius was having a bad morning as he left the minister of magic's office without what he came for, this was a new experience for the blond Slytherin.

Black's comment in the newspaper focused unwanted attention onto his past, a past he had so carefully spent years glossing over. Fudge had been no help whatsoever.

"Lucius what would you have me do? The article clearly stated that the man had been held incognito for the last decade. It's also a record of fact that you were involved, though under the duress and command of the Imperius curse. That it further mentions you never stood trial nor faced questions under truth serum is also a fact, whether you would choose to forget it or not. As far as I can see there is not one word of lie in that story, so how do you expect me to support your proposed charges of slander?"

Lucius was seething, well aware that had the same paper not printed in bold headlines that the Potters supported Fudge, Cornelius would have no qualms about backing his proposal. At the moment everything in the garden was rosy for the minister and he wasn't about to give the press any excuses to go digging for dirt.

Lucius had heard from Draco that the Potter brat had openly ridiculed his death eater family, publicly stating that he wasn't afraid of the Malfoy name or those who carried it. His first instinct had been to head to Hogwarts and make sure Severus dealt severely with the arrogant little shit, now he was glad he didn't.

The boy's actions had seen dramatic changes and not all of them bad, from the Malfoy point of view. Severus being forced to behave was no more than an annoyance at the moment, but losing influence at the ministry could be serious. On the other hand the Potter brat had practically destroyed the blood traitor weasels, and a certain old muggle-loving fool was unquestionably in far deeper shit than Lucius was.

That arse Fudge had casually mentioned truth serum and trial to put Lucius in his place, giving Potter any reason to demand such a thing

would be a really bad idea. He could just imagine the minister, like an eager puppy wagging his tail as he complied with the boy's request.

The Slytherin thing to do would be to wait and see how this played out before making any moves, he would have to owl Draco to keep his eyes open and stay out of trouble, especially with Potter. He was aware his son had the very un-Slytherin habit of shooting his mouth off at the wrong time, Lucius was hoping the boy's attendance at Hogwarts would teach him some restraint.

Lucius was unaware that the owl would be too late to avoid Draco's latest episode in stupidity.

-oOoOo-

Neville had just received a package from his grandmother containing a remembrall when a beautiful snowy white owl landed beside him and held out its leg, he was almost shaking with excitement when he discovered who wrote the note she was carrying. The Potters had said they wouldn't forget about him and here was the proof.

Hi Neville

Told you we'd keep in touch! Things have been quite crazy here or we would have written sooner, please take everything said or written about us with a pinch of salt. The latest news is we have reconsidered moving to Australia and will give Hogwarts another chance. We will be returning on Monday and fill you in on everything that has been happening since we left.

Our new friendship with you was one of the deciding factors in our decision as neither of us has so many friends we can afford to throw a good one away. Keep your head down and don't get into too much trouble until then and we'll see you soon.

Your friends

Harry and Hermione

Neville couldn't believe the evidence his own eyes were providing, he had friends.

A voice he was coming to hate pulled him out of this pleasant feeling, "Oh look, the squib's got a remembrall!"

Neville turned around to see Malfoy and his goons laughing at him, the blond ponce made a grab for the sphere in his hand when mild-mannered Neville Longbottom reacted. The entire episode lasted mere seconds but the changes it brought would have far reaching effects.

As Malfoy attempted to grab the remembrall, Neville closed his hand over it, tightly trapping the Slytherin's meticulously manicured fingers. A panicking Draco used his other hand to reach for his wand, leaving Neville only one option.

He used Draco's trapped hand to pull him forward before using his other hand to put his fist forcibly and squarely into the posturing peacock's face. Neville liked the sound it made so pulled Malfoy back and punched him again. The heir to the Malfoy fortune had never been physically struck in his life and had no idea how to deal with it, Draco continued to try to free his wand as Neville pounded on him again and again.

Crabbe and Goyle began to move when the first punch was thrown, unfortunately for them Neville's Gryffindor year-mates moved quicker. Lavender Brown smacked Vincent in the face with the plate containing her half-eaten breakfast, seeing how effective this was Dean Thomas used the same tactics on Gregory. Both Malfoy's bodyguards were out of the fight and Draco himself slumped to the floor when Neville released him.

Snape was there with his wand drawn and looking for Gryffindor blood, fortunately for the lions, the leader of the pride was right behind him.

"Professor Snape, put your wand away immediately. These are children in our care, simply trying to have their breakfast in peace. There will be no foolish wand-waving here."

Snape was not for backing down, his godson was lying on the floor bleeding and he wanted retribution. "Three members of my house have been subjected to a vicious and brutal attack, the perpetrators should be at least expelled."

Minerva stared him down, "I am just about to investigate the incident and you should know from personal experience I will take the appropriate disciplinary procedure that any errant misbehaviour warrant."

She turned her back on the fuming professor to speak with Neville, "Mr Longbottom, could you explain what happened here please?"

It was an empowered Neville who answered his head of house, a Neville who had friends and just witnessed his housemates defend him. "Malfoy tried to steal my remembrall professor, when I wouldn't give it to him he then reached for his wand so I punched him!"

Draco was lying on the floor with his wand beside him, lending credence to his version of the event. Snape couldn't allow this to get away from him, "He probably only wanted a look and this stupid boy overreacted."

Minerva's stare had Snape taking a step backward, "Professor, I don't know how things work in Slytherin but in Gryffindor we look with our eyes, not our hands!"

She turned her back on him again which further infuriated Snape, "Miss Brown, could you explain your actions please?"

Lavender took a deep, calming breath before answering, "Well professor, you told us our house would be our family while we were in Hogwarts. I saw someone attacking a member of my family so did what I could to help. Surely you don't expect us to sit here and watch three people attack a member of our family without helping?"

The head of Gryffindor wanted to give her cub house points for an answer like that but her sense of fair play just wouldn't allow it, she was loath to punish them though so stole a page out of Severus's

book. "While I admire your spirit Miss Brown I'm afraid the rules state you should have let a professor deal with the situation. You, Mr Longbottom and Mr Thomas will be joining me tonight in my office and we'll discuss matters like these further."

She could see the crestfallen looks on the Gryffindor's faces so gave them a less than subtle hint of what would really be happening. "Please don't stuff yourselves at dinner as I will ask the house elves to supply us with some cakes and refreshments for our discussion." The twinkle in her eye would have done Dumbledore proud and immediately lifted her entire house, that and the fact Snape almost had steam coming out his ears.

"Is that all?" he demanded.

"Oh sorry Professor Snape, I was leaving the punishment of the three Slytherin attackers to you. I will certainly punish them if you are unwilling or unable to do so."

She could see he was on the brink of an explosion and Neville unwittingly provided the fuse for her to light. "Professor McGonagall, I've just heard from Harry and Hermione. They told me that they're returning to Hogwarts."

The entire hall was now quiet as they listened in, "Yes Neville, I spoke to them last night. They are hiring a private potions tutor and want you to join them for the lessons, in fact they have offered the same to all their Gryffindor year-mates and were only sorry they didn't get a chance to know you all better."

As she expected, Snape went off like a rocket at this news. "I'm the Hogwarts potions master, I alone teach this subject in Hogwarts."

Minerva was more than ready for this argument, "The facility has always existed for a student to hire a tutor if they believed it was in their best interest. The Potters are paying for this and have very generously allowed their housemates to participate if they wish."

"Oh hell yes!" was Lavender's answer for all of them.

Snape was indignant, "I will not stand for this!"

Minerva was almost casual in her dismissal of the man's tantrum, "You are of course at liberty to resign. The fact that I will have another registered potions master residing in the castle by next week would allow me to forego the necessity of you having to serve a period of notice. The final decision is of course yours to make."

Snape spun around and approached the headmaster, "What is your opinion of this matter sir?"

Albus hadn't seen the incident that triggered this or any of the by-play, his entire concentration was absorbed by the newspaper in front of him. The vilifying of Albus Dumbledore was as brutal as it was truthful.

Black was a free man, Umbridge was dead and now everyone knew what had transpired that fateful night. Apparently the only thing Albus Dumbledore wasn't being blamed for was the Chudley Cannons loosing again.

The real problem though was that the story was the truth, Albus had a lifelong aversion to people learning the truth but was powerless to fight this.

He had taken baby Harry away and left him on a doorstep, against the child's parents express wishes. He had then never once returned to see how the boy was being treated.

He had left Sirius Black in Azkaban when he had the power to grant him a trial, or even visit the prison himself.

He was the headmaster who sat and took no action as Molly Weasley tried to attack one of his students.

He was the person who erected the duelling wards that didn't take into account someone bouncing off them and finding themselves getting up close and personal with a dementor.

The elves were going to be working overtime today, dealing with the deluge of howlers and a 'request' from the Hogwarts board to explain his actions was a foregone conclusion.

Had the Potters actually left the country, Albus would probably have to go into hiding though he was far from off the hook. Harry had already shown by his treatment of the Weasleys that he could be ruthless, Albus expected no mercy.

His thoughts were interrupted by Severus whining something about Minerva, "Professor Snape, I have already intimated this on several occasions. Professor McGonagall has my complete trust in the way she handles her position, I will not answer this question again."

Snape stormed out the hall as Minerva made her way back over to the three Slytherins that Poppy was currently treating, "Since your head of house didn't see fit to punish you then it falls to me, report to Mr Filch after dinner tonight." Draco was all set to protest loudly when he was cut off by a stern McGonagall. "If you wish to dispute this we can easily arrange to stretch the detentions to cover the rest off the week. You and your companions little forays to the Gryffindor table to taunt and bait other students will stop now. Nature teaches us that when you upset a pride of lions, a mauling is the inevitable result."

Draco so wanted to spout that his father would hear of this, but with Madam Pomfrey currently repairing his mouth, that action was momentarily beyond him.

-oOoOo-

Sirius was enjoying his breakfast when Harry spoiled his appetite, "Sirius, we understand why you hate the place but we need to go to Grimmauld today."

He placed his cutlery on the plate just as Hermione offered him an explanation that was as shocking as anything he heard yesterday. "There is something there that your brother stole from Voldemort in order that the evil bastard could be killed. Regulus was fighting for the right side when he died."

Sirius was speechless and fighting back the tears so Harry continued, "He created horcruxes Sirius, when Regulus discovered this he gave his life to remove the item from where Voldemort had secured it. Kreacher has been faithfully guarding the necklace but was unable to destroy it, the goblins have already agreed to do the deed so we need to get the necklace to Gringotts."

Sirius felt Dan Granger's hand settle on his shoulder in an offer of support, "The kids told us they went through hell to get this the last time and it even cost Dumbledore his life, I can understand you not wanting to go back to your childhood home but this evil needs to be destroyed. It can be done by lunch time and then you and I can spend the evening in our local pub getting wasted, I know I definitely need something stronger than the few scotches we had last night."

Sirius never took his eyes off his godson, the love he felt for this boy knew no bounds. "Yesterday you gave me back my freedom and today you give me back my brother. I have been made welcome by this wonderful family and you'll have to excuse my tears, having nothing to feel happy about for so long has left me struggling to deal with these strange emotions. I just want to say thank you to everyone and Dan I'd love some company when getting blinding drunk tonight."

Dan squeezed his shoulder, "Harry and I tied one on a couple of times in Australia and felt better for it, especially as Hermione can brew the hangover cure. We're going to have to wait a few years before he can join us but just don't play him at pool for drinks, I was up and down to the bar all night."

This brought a chuckle to everyone, Hermione had loved watching her dad and Harry head off down the pub together. This also gave the Granger girls time to sit back on the porch with some chilled wine and chat, usually about their two men in the pub. Even though they weren't a couple in the romantic sense then, the hope of this being achieved someday was what had kept Hermione going.

It was Harry who spoke though, "You were killed before we found out the last time Sirius and we never got the opportunity to tell you, that won't be happening this time around. We should probably get that

prophecy sphere out the ministry as well, destroying it before anyone else discovers its existence."

Sirius had heard about the prophecy last evening and reiterated his promise to aid them, "I will go to Grimmauld Place today, help you with anything else you need and even try to stop asking so many questions about the future. What you have done for me in the last twenty-four hours is nothing short of miraculous!"

The marauder now had a busy day in front of him, a visit to his old house, a trip to Gringotts then shopping for his own clothes. He would be ready for those drinks tonight, Sirius could actually use one before entering his ancestral home.

-oOoOo-

The Weasleys were leaving their ancestral home for the last time, everything was packed, shrunk and stored. Molly had been in tears all day but was inconsolable as her children flooed from the Burrow, never to return. The realisation that the house her family had been so happy in would not be here tomorrow was finally hitting home to the Weasley matriarch. Combine that with the fact her husband had barely spoke to her, far less offered any comfort, and Molly was as miserable as she'd ever been. That the whole family blamed her for their troubles had led to a lonely few days as she had been avoided whenever possible, Ginny wouldn't even look in her direction.

Arthur practically pushed his wife into the floo before taking a moment in the now silent house to reflect on his life here. There had been more happy times than sad but he couldn't help the shiver that ran down his spine with the thought that the Weasley family's troubles were far from over. The fine wasn't as heavy as Arthur feared, giving them a better stab at a new life somewhere else. Charlie had also been in touch to offer any help he could, Arthur knew dragon handling was a calling, rather than a career and his second son wasn't well paid. Just the lad making the offer lifted Arthur's spirits and gave him hope they could come out the other side of this stronger.

Bill was going to take the boys back to Hogwarts on Monday before they left Britain to seek employment elsewhere, Arthur had no

intention of allowing Molly anywhere near the castle and was struggling to forgive her for the trouble she'd caused. Perhaps if she would realise what she'd done then maybe they could begin to patch things up, but as long as she kept blaming the Potter boy for everything then Arthur had no intention of forgiving his wife. Normally he would just have agreed with the woman as he sought a quiet life, he knew that part of this was his fault for not standing up to her more often.

His wife was an opinionated woman, her greatest fault though was in thinking that everyone wanted, no needed to hear her opinion on everything. At the heart of the problem was the fact that she thought she was entitled to grab the Potter boy and give him a piece of her mind. That the boy's wife had objected and the couple had then put forward charges was them being 'bloody minded' as far as Molly was concerned.

Arthur could and had made a lot of allowances for his wife but this was a step too far, unless she could face up to the fact that she was wrong then he just couldn't see how this could be resolved.

One last longing look and he entered the floo, it would be tight at Muriel's but it wasn't for long. Soon the boys would be off to Scotland and the three adults heading for Europe, leaving little Ginny behind. Now that really broke Arthur's heart.

-oOoOo-

Emma had been amazed at the magical blueprints for their new house, if they wanted to alter the size or layout of a room then one of the kids just used their wand to pull a wall to exactly where they thought it should be. This gave them unlimited options and was a lot of fun though Hermione kept trying to make the library bigger, it would seem some things never change. The magical world might not have computers but this was as close to a design program as to make no difference.

They wanted the house to be a combination of magical and mundane, there would be electricity and phone lines while the water and drainage would be provided by runes. The kitchen would have all

modern appliances but with liberal use of self-cleaning charms to make the devices really labour saving.

With the plans at a stage where the family were all happy with them, the magical builder was then talking weeks to have it completed, and apologising because their mixture of specifications would make him take that long.

Emma's first sight of the burrow left her totally confused, this was a beautiful setting in Devon yet the building jutted up into the air like something a four-year-old would build using Lego. They had all this land yet had made the rickety structure at least four stories high, Emma could see no sense to it.

As the contractors started tearing the building down she noticed Harry had Hermione held tightly in his arms, comfortingly whispering in her ear as she watched a place they had once loved raised to the ground.

Emma also noticed a little blond girl in the trees and brought it to their attention, this had the effect of immediately ending the funk that both had been slipping into. The young couple walked slowly over to their friend, hoping they didn't spook Luna into running away before they could talk.

Their hearts went out to this frightened little girl who was standing here alone, with tears running down her cheeks, "I'm sorry, I know I shouldn't be here but my best friend, my only friend lived in that house and now I'll never see her here again."

The impulse to hug Luna was almost overpowering, Harry tried to talk to her. "Well we'll be living here very soon and always have room for new friends, you're very welcome to come by here anytime you want. Our door will always be open and we need someone to show us around the place. Do you live in the village?"

Luna was half-expecting to be shouted at and told to 'get lost!' this was a surprising, yet very welcome change. "No I live with my father at the Rookery, we'll be your nearest neighbours. My name is Luna Lovegood, some people call me loony."

Hermione intended to nip that in the bud, "Not while we're around they won't, Luna is a beautiful name. My name is Hermione and this is my husband Harry, we're the Potters."

Luna's eyes focused at this, the Potters were both pleased that they didn't immediately shoot straight to Harry's scar though. "My friend Ginny told me she met you two." On seeing the expressions on both the Potter's faces, Luna thought she needed to clarify what she meant. "Ginny was very impressed with you Hermione, she described in great detail how you protected Harry from her mother and brothers." She hung her head down, "Ronald is the one who calls me loony."

This time Hermione couldn't hold back, she had her arm around Luna's shoulders. "Well he won't be doing it again if we're within earshot, nobody gets away with saying that about our friend."

Luna had tears in her eyes again, but this time for a different reason. "Ginny told me you looked really nice people, wait until I write and tell her I've not only met you but we're going to be friends."

The little blond seemed to have a problem with her last comment as her expression changed to that of sadness, this prompted Harry to speak out. "What's the matter Luna, you look upset?"

"Ginny is going to be staying with her Aunt Muriel as her parents go abroad looking for work. I wouldn't be a very good friend if I sent a letter telling her I've met two new friends while she is so miserable."

Both Potters had met 'Aunt Muriel' and shuddered at the thought of having to stay there, Harry would rather stay with the Dursleys any day of the week than live with her. At ten Harry at least had his cupboard as a sanctuary, Ginny was going to be subjected to Muriel's constant ranting without any means of escape.

Luna drew them out their reminiscing, "Ginny doesn't blame you for what happened, she knows her mother was at fault and has hardly spoken a word to her since. For years she dreamed of meeting Harry Potter, then when she actually does her mother spoiled it for her."

Now she's forced to stay with a woman nobody can stand, I just hope she gets to Hogwarts next year."

Hermione couldn't help but admire Luna's devotion, but then again she was the same in protecting the few friends that she'd made. "We're going back to Hogwarts as well but, because we're a married couple, we will be coming home every weekend. We will be back here next week to see how the building is progressing and can meet you again if you want?"

"Oh that would be wonderful! Could I bring my friend Ginny? She could floo and stay with me for the weekend That would not only give her a break from her aunt but something to look forward to."

Harry and Hermione may have returned with hardened attitudes and a wide streak of ruthlessness but they were in no danger of turning dark. One glance at Luna's hopeful expression totally melted their hearts, there was just no way they could refuse her. Seeing Ginny at Hogwarts had brought home to them just how young she was, they would give her a chance as Luna's friend.

"Yeah sure Luna, come on over and meet my mum, dad and Sirius."

"Oh Hermione, do you think Stubby Boardman would give me an autograph for my dad? The Hobgoblins were his favourite group before he quit." The hope expressed in those eyes again got a positive answer, they were just hoping Sirius played along with them.

Emma had carefully watched the entire scene and had never seen a person change moods so quickly, the girl had been crying at first yet was now holding Harry and Hermione's hands as they skipped towards her. She knew Luna was the reason they were moving here, she and Neville had been the two people who'd never let Harry and Hermione down. Having someone described to you as 'interesting' meant Emma couldn't wait to meet the girl.

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Another little girl was sitting on her father's lap, crying her eyes out. It was bad enough they were all going away to leave her, they were

leaving her with her Auntie Muriel for Merlin's sake! The thought of being stuck here and not seeing any of her family until at least Christmas was having a devastating effect on Ginny.

She didn't know there was currently an owl winging its way to her from Luna that would help banish her tears. There was life after the Burrow for Ginny, she just hadn't found it yet!

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 7

Ginny couldn't help but stare at the letter that temptingly offered her a faint hope of sanctuary, deep down inside she knew it would never come to pass. Auntie Muriel wouldn't allow it and her mother was going to explode the instant she discovered who had bought the Burrow.

She had her eyes well and truly opened by her mother's outrageous reaction to Harry Potter, though surprisingly it was Hermione Potter who drastically changed Ginny's outlook on the world.

Her mother had been teaching Ginny to cook, clean and sew as if that was all there was to a witch's life, the woman had the future all mapped out for her only daughter. Find the right man, preferably the aforementioned famous Harry Potter, settle down and play house while raising her grandbabies. For more than one reason, their visit to Hogwarts had blown that pipedream into tiny little pieces.

Ginny had watched in wonder as Hermione Potter had defeated not only her mother, but Percy and then physically floored Ron. As if that wasn't enough the young witch then faced down McGonagall and Dumbledore, all in defence of her husband. The fact that the girl was almost the same age as Ginny blew her mind.

She now understood that the mother she'd considered to be a powerful witch was nothing more than domineering women who bullied weaker people. Ginny may only be ten but the Hogwarts incident had already set her mind about how she wanted to grow up, she didn't want a husband that needed his shed as a refuge for some peace and quiet.

Hermione Potter was now the new role model of what Ginny Weasley aspired to be. Hermione was no stay at home wife, rather a full partner in a marriage who was going to be at her husband's side, facing everything that came their way together.

Her crush on the boy-who-lived would probably always linger, not helped by Luna writing that he was really nice to talk to, though her

mother's wish to have Harry Potter as a son-in-law was certainly not going to come true now.

Ginny was currently holding an invitation to stay with her friend and meet the girl who made such a big impression on her. Hermione Potter was awesome, though as the wife of the boy who lived, Ginny supposed she should have expected no less.

With a voice that could do as much nerve damage as a Cruciatus curse, her Auntie Muriel was on her case, again!

"Ginevra, it's rude enough of you to receive post at the dinner table, but to then read it while everyone is still eating is the height of bad manners. If the letter is so important that it couldn't wait, then you should share it with the entire company."

Ginny decided to give it her best shot, "My friend Luna has invited me to spend the weekend with her..."

She never got to say any more as the voice actually increased in its power to inflict pain, "Absolutely not! It's going to take me all my time to instruct you on how to behave like a proper young lady without you undoing all my good work by cavorting around the countryside with that Lovegood girl. For her own sake, that child should be placed in an orphanage. Xeno Lovegood couldn't raise dandelions in his garden, far less a daughter. You will not be spending time with that girl ever again."

Ginny had tears slowly running down her cheeks, "May I be excused?"

Muriel was merciless, "No you may not! We don't waste food in this house. You will finish your dinner and then assist with the washing-up. It's time for you to grow up, we should already be looking to get you betrothed."

Arthur couldn't take it anymore and left the table, heading straight out the room, his actions though just made Muriel worse.

"How am I supposed to teach the child manners when the parent behaves like that? The sooner you all leave here and it's just young Ginevra and I, the better. Now what else does that letter say?"

Ginny was trying to get hold of herself, "Luna met the people who bought the Burrow," everyone was now silent as their eyes were glued to the littlest Weasley, awaiting the news. None of them were prepared for what came next. "It was the Potters!"

There was mayhem until Bill shouted them down, "Quiet!"

Percy couldn't let it go though, "But Bill, they stole our home!"

"They didn't steal anything and, had you said that in public, mum and dad could have ended up in court. They bought our land at a very fair price, the only other offer on the table was from Lucius Malfoy and was almost a tenth of the one our family accepted. Malfoy wanted to publicly rub dad's nose in it, he probably made sure all of his 'friends' wouldn't bid either. Without the other offer from the Potters, none of you would have been able to return to school."

Ron still didn't get the point, "But they're living in our house!"

It was a still tearful Ginny who answered him, "Our house is completely gone, Luna said they removed every trace of it and are building from scratch."

There were now tears in almost every eye at that revelation, the Burrow held a lot of happy memories for all of them, there was no going back now.

Arthur rather decisively marched back into the dinning room that now had the atmosphere more akin to a funeral parlour, "Boys are you packed?" After receiving nods all round he turned to Ginny, "I have another option for you princess, would you like to stay with Luna?"

Ginny had trouble believing what she was hearing so wanted to make sure there were no mistakes, "You mean instead of here?"

Her father's nod had her diving out her seat and straight into his waiting arms, bugger asking her aunt's permission to leave the table, she was leaving this entire nightmare.

Molly just looked at her husband for confirmation, "I just spoke to Xeno on the floo, he would be delighted if Ginny stayed there. Luna has been withdrawing in to herself more and more since her mother died and he thinks this is the very thing to help both of our daughters. I feel bad enough having to leave Ginny behind but couldn't live with myself after seeing how unhappy she is here?"

Muriel was raging, "That child will grow up spoilt if you give in to her every whim, a touch of discipline is what she needs, not pampering."

With that comment Arthur lost any doubts that he'd made the right decision, "I don't think 'pampered' could be used to describe any of my children, you seem more than wiling to administer the discipline Muriel but there is no love in this house to balance it out. You are welcome to raise any children you have, however you see fit but mine will be raised the way I want. Weasleys let's go, we're spending the night at the Leaky Cauldron before going our separate ways in the morning."

It was as if Arthur had performed an exorcism on the room, there were suddenly smiling redheads hurrying to collect their trunks in case their father changed his mind or they got left behind.

Molly hadn't said a word, her opinion had neither been asked for nor required. Even she though had a smile on her face at the thought of getting out of here. She hated to think how Ginny would have turned out living with Muriel and was thankful to the Lovegoods that they no longer had to find out.

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It was a jovial breakfast in the Granger house, Emma had thought the location of their new home was beautiful and had immediately fell in love with Luna. Her mothering instinct had kicked into high gear at first sight of the little blond waif, and yet when Luna smiled she was pure sunshine that lightened your heart.

Sirius had taken a fair bit of ribbing as 'Stubby', he was so shocked by Luna's autograph request that the marauder let slip he'd used his likeness of the star to woo the 'occasional' young lady. Harry had literally been rolling on the ground with laughter.

Dan was desperate to find some 'Hobgoblin' memorabilia just to wind Sirius up. Since they were all heading for the Leaky Cauldron so the kids could floo to Hogsmead, Harry had slipped Dan some gallons to buy whatever he could find in the Alley.

They were asking Sirius if they needed to turn a room of the new house into a recording studio when he reminded the Potters he would be getting a new wand today. Both wisely decided upsetting a marauder was maybe not the best thing to do so toned the ribbing down.

The group had just entered the Leaky Cauldron when they heard someone calling their names, a hyper-excited Luna practically pounced on them. "What are you doing here? My friend Ginny is coming to live with me, isn't that great? Hermione, why have you got your wand out?"

Hermione had spotted Molly Weasley and her wand was in her hand without conscious thought on her part, "It's simple Luna, that woman has twice tried to accost my husband, there will not be a third time!"

Hermione's eyes contained a fierceness that frightened anyone who saw her. Dan was likening it to a western movie as people were quickly cleared a path between his daughter and that woman. He turned to his wife and couldn't believe what he saw, mild mannered Emma Granger was like a coiled spring, ready to pounce on the Weasley woman. Dan wrapped his arm around her waist, "Easy honey, the kids have this under control."

Her eyes were smouldering as Emma growled, "She makes one move toward them and she's mine!"

The sheer emotion in her voice left Dan wondering whether to be frightened or ask the proprietor if he had a vacant bedroom to let as

soon as the kids headed off to school. He was currently leaning heavily toward the second option, this was a side of his wife he'd never seen before and he liked it, Dan liked it a lot!

Sirius was surprised at how many people were in the pub on a Monday morning until he noticed most of them were eating breakfast. The marauder was trying not to laugh at the wizarding public being scared by a not yet twelve-year-old witch, that was until he looked at said witch. The tip of her wand was actually glowing with power and only Harry's arms wrapped around his wife's waist was preventing Hermione from attacking.

Arthur Weasley knew there was more chance of his wife resisting the last piece of chocolate cake on the plate than there was of her not causing a scene here this morning, he acted quickly and decisively. He pushed Molly firmly into a seat and had a full body bind curse on her before she had time to do anything more than try to kill him with a look. He then took Ginny by the hand and walked slowly toward the Potters.

"Lord and Lady Potter, I would like to apologise on behalf of my family for all the trouble we've caused you."

They both had liked Arthur in the last timeline but Molly had led him around by the nose, after watching what he just did both were impressed that the balding man had finally grown a pair where his wife was concerned.

"Mr Weasley, I would like to apologise that you and your eldest son both lost your jobs over this incident. We wanted the guilty punished though feel it has went too far. Neither of you were involved in any of the incidents yet still had to shoulder blame."

Arthur gave Harry a slight bow of thanks, "Can I assume that's why you made the generous offer you did on our land?"

Harry shook his head, "We only offered what we considered was a fair price sir, the Potters are not the Malfoys and don't look to profit from the misfortune of others. My honour dictated the price sir."

Luna noticed that Hermione was starring daggers at Ginny and attempted to break the ice, she grabbed her friend and pulled her forward. "This is Ginny, my best friend who's coming to live with me."

Harry and Hermione's relationship had developed over the years to the point where they could hold conversations with merely a glance, this was one of those times when that ability came in handy. They'd both become resigned to meeting Ginny with Luna this weekend, with her now taking up permanent residence in the Lovegood's home it became a whole different ballgame. Their intention was for Luna to spend a lot of time in their new home, a plan that since meeting Luna, both Granger parents wholeheartedly agreed with. The problem was that, largely thanks to them disrupting the timeline, Ginny would now be there as she and Luna were both going to be a package deal from now on.

Hermione gave the slightest nod of her head, there was no way the Potters would abandon Luna so they were just going to have to put up with a ten-year-old Ginny. Both hoped that her change of environment would curb some of her less attractive qualities that appeared later in life.

"Ginny, like your father and eldest brother, you were not involved in either of the incidents. Being Luna's friend is also a big plus with us so let's count this as the first time we've met. Hi, I'm Harry Potter and this is my wife Hermione."

The 'eep' that Ginny emitted only needed her elbow being submerged in a butter dish to have a happy memory slap Harry squarely in the face. Thinking back to those days that hadn't actually happened yet, he couldn't help but reach the conclusion that the young girl's crush was just that, a crush. Whether it had been manufactured or manipulated in the timeline was another thing altogether, Harry could see that Ginny living with Luna might be good for both of them.

Hermione squeezed his arm, "We have to move love or we're going to be late. We didn't even get our timetables so don't know what subject is first this morning"

They said cheerio to everyone and promised to see them at the weekend, trying not to laugh at Xeno Lovegood, having cornered Sirius to obtain an exclusive regarding when 'Stubby' was getting the band back together.

Luna called out to them before they headed off, "Hey, you can floo to our house if you want, then we can walk over to the site? It would save you having to take a car as you could leave from here."

That sounded an excellent suggestion and they made arrangements to visit on Saturday, everyone began heading off to their destinations as Arthur returned to his still cursed wife. He wisely decided to remove her wand before lifting the spell, an enraged Molly was bad enough without giving her a wand to use on him.

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The Weasleys were at the castle gate talking with Remus, the 'new' rules meant this was as far as Bill could go. Their conversation was loudly interrupted by one Harry Potter.

"Hey Moony, how are you? Padfoot wants to know if you managed to liberate a certain piece of parchment from Filch's office yet?"

Remus was laughing, "Morning Harry and Hermione, give me a break. I've not had time."

"But Moony, Padfoot said you guys were the best. Surely you don't need the son of Prongs and his wife to show you how it's done?" Harry's voice changed down a few octaves, "My father worked on that and I want it, there is so little left to remind me of him."

Hermione's entire attention was on a pair of twins who were currently trying to give the impression of not hanging on every word spoken and failing miserably. Both of them were staring at each other with expressions that were easy to read, having been caught completely off guard.

The twin's position had left the Potters in a quandary. As far as they were concerned Molly, Percy and Ron were all black and white cases

while the rest of the family were cloaked in varying shades of grey, in their original timeline Fred had already been dead before the Weasley betrayal took place. George had been in the courtroom and, while he didn't speak in their defence, he certainly didn't say anything against them either. For all they knew, George could quite possibly never have spoken another word since his twin died fighting that night.

This was an opportunity for them to make the first move, they'd dangled the 'marauder's' carrot in front of them to see if they would offer up the map. They'd given it to Harry in his third year before they knew the marauders identities, it was now up to them whether they approached the couple or not.

Harry added some sweetener, "I assume you are Bill Weasley, I would like to offer our apologies on you losing your job over this. It really isn't fair considering you weren't even in the country at the time, I offered the same apology to your father before we left the Leaky Cauldron."

Ron just couldn't resist, "I'll bet you did Potter, arrange for them to lose their jobs so you can buy our house out from under us!"

Harry did well to resist killing the bastard there and then, the only thing stopping him was that it would be too quick. He didn't need a masters in divination to see that there was going to be suffering in Ronald Weasley's future. "That would be a very Slytherin thing to do, wouldn't it? Since my wife and I are both Gryffindors it would appear the hat sorted you into the correct house after all."

Ron looked ready to explode at Harry's comment but Bill's glare held him in check before the eldest Weasley brother accepted Harry's apology.

"See you later Moony, tell Hagrid we'll be down some time this week for a visit." The couple headed off leaving Ron and Percy furious while the other three redheads were deep in thought, though for different reasons.

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All noise stopped as the Potters entered the great hall and headed straight for Neville, they had discussed what might happen on their return and were pretty confident of their predictions.

Dumbledore would act all serene, as if a couple of first years returning to school was not something a man of his importance needed to concern himself with. They were also pretty sure 'turban Tom' was going to sit back and allow them to do as much damage as they could, it was all good in his book. The doppelganger though was unaware that the Potters had already read the book and were changing its ending. The chances of Snape being serene or sitting back were so low you would need an electron microscope to catch a glimpse of them, the Potters weren't wrong about any of the trio.

Dumbledore and Quirrell were still at the staff table while Snape was hurriedly making his way toward them, his cloak action was impressive.

Emma had asked why they were going after Snape if he was on their side, it didn't take any thought on Harry's part to provide an answer. "His last act led directly to me walking alone into the forest to die, part of me wonders if he died happy knowing that. He may have been on our side but that doesn't change the fact that he was and is an unmitigated bastard who revelled in his role of punishing us just a bit too much for keeping up appearances sake. While we don't necessarily want him dead, we certainly don't want him as part of our lives in any way, shape or form. Dumbledore falls into the same category, he's an obstacle that will try to block our path so needs to be removed."

Snape was now standing directly behind the boy, "Potter, I really don't appreciate the lies you spread about me in the newspaper. I demand an apology, with a full retraction to be printed before the week is out."

Harry stood slowly and turned to face the professor, comforted by the knowledge that Hermione had his back covered. "Professor, I don't appreciate the fact that a marked death eater not only escaped Azkaban, but is now working in an educational establishment. The headmaster said he trusted you and that was all it took for your

freedom while my godfather languished in that awful place without even a trial. Just what is your 'special relationship' with the headmaster that drove him to save your arse? Did you know Gellert Grindelwald was also a 'special friend' of his? It would appear our headmaster has a taste for the dark side."

Severus was calling on all his years of experience not to strike this little bastard down where he stood, only McGonagall appearing at his side tilted the balance. He was well aware she wanted him out the castle, without Dumbledore's protection and Slughorn coming to Hogwarts, one more mistake would see him kicked out. He stormed out the hall, nearly bowling over the returning Weasleys. One sight of the youngest redhead wearing Slytherin robes almost pushed him over the edge, "Detention with me tonight Weasley, we set a higher standard in Slytherin house, and wearing our breakfast on our robes is unacceptable."

Albus was stunned by the knowledge Harry possessed, he was sure the number of people who knew that particular piece of information about him and Gellert could be counted on the fingers of one hand. He was pleased to see Minerva ask the boy some questions as he, like the rest of the hall, participated in the latest form of Hogwarts entertainment, Potter watching.

Minerva was handing them their timetables and asking the question everyone wanted answered, "Mr Potter, you seem particularly well informed for someone so young and with so little contact with our world?"

Hermione smiled and stood beside her husband, "As an educator you must know that it's the quality of knowledge that's more important than the quantity. We had a very interesting visit from someone who is writing a book on the headmaster. They shared their research in exchange for Harry telling his story and allowing it to be used. He made sure to tell them to leave room to cover the court case when Harry and Sirius press charges over mistreatment, mismanagement or sheer incompetence of his actions. Did you know his nose is that shape because his brother broke it at their sister's funeral?"

Minerva was as shocked as the rest of the hall at this morning's revelations, any book that aired Dumbledore's dirty laundry and had an interview with Harry Potter was destined to be an instant best seller. The witch didn't have the same-sex prejudices that some people possessed, she just didn't need the image of Albus and Severus together in her mind when she'd just eaten breakfast. She knew Albus had a brother and was aware there was bad blood between them, Minerva had no idea it had lasted as long or that it ran so deep. A book and a court case could ruin the headmaster, strangely enough that idea did not cause her as much pain as it would have done even a month ago.

As the Potters sat back down and Neville began introducing them to their Gryffindor year mates, Minerva noticed Albus leaving the staff table. He'd waited years on Harry coming to Hogwarts, only to find that he was nothing like Albus, or any of them had imagined. She suspected his next move would be to cast aspirations that the boy was turning dark, Minerva had seen his new family and would violently refute those suggestions. Just because the boy wasn't willing to be the headmaster's puppet didn't mean he was turning dark, this couple had minds of their own and Minerva couldn't wait to get them into her class, she was so looking forward to teaching them.

Ron sat at the end of the Slytherin table, paying no attention to the gap that appeared between him and his fellow housemates. He was too busy concentrating on trying to cram in another breakfast before his first Hogwarts lesson, the fact he had no idea what or where that lesson was had no chance of permeating his brain while there was still food on the table.

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Harry and Hermione had a brilliant day and all the first year Gryffindors were invited back to their quarters for a look-see after dinner. Hermione was a lot more relaxed this time around without the burning need to prove herself that had alienated the young girl from her peers in the first place. As a married girl, especially with Harry as her husband, Parvati and Lavender thought she was the coolest witch in the school.

Harry fond himself getting along better with Dean and Seamus this time around as well as a more confident Neville. Since there was no competition with Ron determined to claim Harry Potter exclusively as his best mate, there was a much more relaxed and comfortable atmosphere between the first year Gryffindors.

They had breezed through their classes, helping their fellow Gryffindors and amassing a bucket load of house points along the way. Harry felt no sense of guilt or that they were cheating, Hermione had known all the answers the first time around. The difference now being that she wasn't almost dislocating her shoulder by frantically shooting her hand in the air every few minutes, while determined to impress the professors with her knowledge.

The potters had certainly made an impact on Hogwarts.

Albus was drinking his cocoa while trying to figure out his next move, he'd spent ages on his knees with his head in the floo, calling in favour after favour in an attempt to discover this mysterious author's identity. Any book mentioning Ariana, Abe and Gellert would have to be suppressed for the greater good, painting him in a bad light at this particular time would be very bad for the wizarding world.

His biggest problem though was that the Potters had not only read the material but apparently believed it to be true, the fact that it was true mattered not a jot in Dumbledore's grand scheme. What was really important was getting the Potter lad into his sphere of influence, that Harry seemed hell bent on destroying any influence Albus had just added a degree of difficulty to the task.

Ron Weasley was currently taking an eyeball from one jar, polishing it by hand before replacing it into another jar. It was a dirty, mind-numbingly repetitive task that provided plenty of time to ponder on the root of all his troubles, the Potters.

He'd tried late last night to see if the offer of staying with loony was open to him as well, his father had killed that idea stone dead. If Ron wanted to be home schooled then his Auntie Muriel was his only other option. After spending a short time there he was more convinced than ever that anything had to be better than that.

He'd watched with envy as the Gryffindor students had all obviously enjoyed their classes and sat together for their meals, Ron was being treated like a pariah in Slytherin with not one person speaking to him the entire day.

His jealousy grew when he watched all the Gryffindors leaving together while he headed off to detention. As Neville jokingly hit Harry on the arm, one thought kept repeating in Ron's mind, 'that should have been me!'

Percy Weasley was also consumed with jealousy, sitting in the common room while Oliver Wood headed out to perform his prefect rounds with Penelope Clearwater left the boy seething with rage. The twin badges of Quidditch Captain and Prefect on Oliver's robes almost made Percy physically sick with envy. He also knew exactly who to blame for him currently being badgeless, the Potters.

His father had told him to let this be but that was not going to happen, Percy's honor demanded revenge and that's exactly what it would have. He had trouble planning it at the moment though as his imagination just kept flashing up images of Oliver and Penelope holding hands by the end of their rounds. One phrase kept repeating itself over and over in his mind, 'that should have been me!'

Draco Malfoy was not a happy snake, as if being punched out in the great hall by that squib Longbottom wasn't bad enough, he now had to share a dorm with a blood traitor Weasley. Like everyone else he'd watched on, enraptured by the drama of the Potters returning to Hogwarts. Then, like a good little Slytherin, he'd written it all down and owled it off to daddy. Draco couldn't help but feel envious of all the attention the Potters received, at the back of his mind he couldn't deny his greatest wish, 'that should have been me!'

Neville left the Potters with the rest of the Gryffindor first years before the curfew. He had all his homework done, read over the material needed for his classes tomorrow and had a fun time with his friends. He was so surprised yet very, very happy with his lot in life. One thought kept playing over in his mind, 'Gran will never believe this is happening to me!'

Harry and Hermione were just about to head into their bedroom when a loud knock on their door had them wondering what was going on. Hermione drew her wand and held it down at the side of her leg while Harry answered the door to a pair of redheaded twins.

"Could we talk to you a moment?" Fred asked nervously.

Harry was unsure if they were nervous about meeting them or because a suit of armour with a sharp looking sword was currently blocking the passageway. "It's ok Charles, we've got it from here." The suit of armour moved to allow the twins to enter as Harry held the door open for them.

The hesitantly entered before Fred gushed, "Look, this is awkward and we don't usually do awkward but our dad and Bill don't seem to have a problem with you two so why should we?"

George was nodding his head in agreement as he reached into his robes, only to be stopped by Hermione's wand almost touching his nose. She gave a resigned shrug. "It's not as if we don't trust you, well actually it is. Let's just see how we get on when you remove your hand from there, if it has a wand in it then your brother will be carrying you back to your dorm."

George slowly removed a piece of parchment from his robes, "We couldn't help but overhear you this morning and believe this rightfully belongs to the son of Prongs."

Fred was delighted to see the wand lowered from his twin's face, "We were hoping you would let us borrow it occasionally when we're involved in things that we don't particularly want to get caught doing."

Harry's whole face had lit up, "Gentlemen, I have no problem agreeing with your request since the map was constructed solely for that purpose."

George noticed Hermione still hadn't put her wand away, "You don't trust many people, do you?"

She shook her head, "Experience has taught us to be careful of whom we trust, too many people want to get to know us to serve their own agendas." Both twins glanced nervously toward one another, "Ok, out with it. Why are you really here?"

They could tell Hermione wasn't really annoyed with them, yet! There was a hint of steel in her voice that didn't rule out she might be very soon. Fred pushed ahead, "We were hoping you could introduce us to the marauders, they're rather heroes of ours."

Hermione chuckled, "Aw shit, Padfoot's head is going to get even bigger."

Harry couldn't help but smile at these two, he'd liked them from the first moment he'd met them and they were by a very wide margin his favourite Weasleys. He took the map and activated it, "Leave it with me guys and I'll see what I can do, the corridor is currently empty so you should head back before you get caught out after curfew."

George took the comical hump to Harry's implied slur, "I'll have you know the Weasley twins are never caught out after curfew. What do you think we are, a couple of amateurs?"

Fred added a proviso, "Besides we're the best beaters in Hogwarts and Ollie would never do anything that might see us kicked off the Quidditch team."

As they watched them leave, the Potters knew dealing with Molly, Percy and Ron would now require a degree of subtlety. That was ok, they could do subtle.

A quick check showed a dot marked Peter Pettigrew was currently in the Slytherin first year's dorm, both wondered what effect it would have on Dumbledore if a death eater other than Snape was found hiding in his school, they intended to find out.

With a 'mischief managed' the couple headed for bed.

A/N apologies to readers of FG2, I've never left a story this amount of time before and I am having some trouble picking up the thread again.

I know where the story is heading, it's just getting back into the character's mindsets that's causing me the problems. Have started working on the next chapter of FG2 but it's like pulling teeth, slow and painful work. Never fear though, I will get there in the end .

Chapter 8

Lucius Malfoy was mulling over the parchment he'd received from his son, once more thanking Merlin he didn't go angrily barging into that school to challenge Potter's rant against him. The boy was rampaging through the magical world like a horde of giants, flattening all who stood against him. Lucius was only a few school board votes short of being able to turf Dumbledore out of Hogwarts, these latest revelations alone wouldn't quite push his swaying supporters off the fence but it set the old fool up nicely for the biggest fall from grace ever seen.

He may have to allow Severus to take the fall as well though, in the grand scheme of things, this would be acceptable losses. The potion master's main duties were to spy on the old fool; if Dumbledore no longer resided in the castle then Severus would be free to use his talents exclusively for brewing more financially lucrative, totally illegal potions.

Lucius could construct a lab in the manor and use his contacts to procure the more exotic ingredients, while taking a percentage at every turn. Dumbledore would be gone, Severus would be looked after and the Malfoys would make even more gold, that was how a Slytherin operated.

-oOoOo-

Dan answered the door to find an imposing woman standing there with an entourage, "Mr Granger I presume? I'm Amelia Bones and these ladies and gentlemen are members of the Magical Law Enforcement Department. Could we please speak with Sirius Black?"

He couldn't think what else to do so led them into the kitchen where Emma was preparing breakfast.

Sirius shot to his feet at the first sight of their unexpected guests, "Amelia, is there trouble with Harry and Hermione?"

Amelia smiled, "Take it easy Sirius, as far as I know everything is fine with them. I received a rather strange note from your godson,

requesting my immediate presence at Hogwarts in my official capacity. It also suggested that I turn up 'mob handed' and asked if I could bring you along as well. I was hoping you might be able to throw some light on the matter but I can see you're as much in the dark as we are. Would you like to finish your breakfast or head straight there?"

Sirius was already moving, "I'll get my cloak."

Emma was still worried though, "How can we find out if they're ok? I really didn't want them to go back to that place."

Dan had his arm comfortingly around his wife's shoulder, "Don't worry love, you know they'll look after each other. If they were in any trouble, Hedwig would have been waking us up this morning, not Amelia here."

Since she had the opportunity Amelia asked a question that was puzzling her, "Mrs Granger, you seem to be taking the children being married in your stride, I am guardian to my niece who's the same age and I don't know how I would react in similar circumstances."

Amelia Bones had built a career on being able to read people so could say with a degree of certainty that the smile which illuminated the woman's face was as genuine as any she'd ever seen. "Ah but that's purely down to the young man who capture my daughter's heart years ago, they've been best friends for a long time and anyone could see they were perfect for each other. Hermione had numerous educational choices available to her as she registers near the very top of the intelligence scale, when given the opportunity to study magic with Harry her mind was instantly made up. As a mother, Harry is everything I could want for my daughter, I wish they were a bit older but you can't have it all."

Dan agreed with his wife, "The day Harry confessed how his relatives treated him; we jumped in the car and went straight over there. The kids maybe adults in your world but they are still considered minors in ours, our lawyers are currently perusing having us declared as his legal guardians. No matter what, he will never set foot in that house again."

Amelia's gaze shifted from the Grangers to Sirius as he hurried down the stairs, she was delighted to see that Harry now had caring adults in his life.

The group portkeyed from the Granger's directly to Hogsmead and made their way to the castle, leaving behind a couple of anxious parents.

-oOoOo-

Albus was at his breakfast when Amelia entered the great hall, accompanied by Remus, Sirius and half a dozen aurors. The chill of dread that spread through him was intensified when the Potters rose to meet the group, Harry produced a piece of parchment which resulted in six aurors following Sirius and Remus out the door at speeds that would have earned students a detention. Ominously Amelia and the Potters approached the staff table as the hall's occupants once more anticipated the entertainment about to be provided.

"Albus Dumbledore it would appear that Slytherin house is harbouring a dangerous death eater, once again the safety of Hogwarts students is being compromised."

"Amelia I can assure you, Professor Snape is no threat to the students of Hogwarts. He has my complete trust and I find your accusations unfounded and offensive."

She couldn't hide her smirk, "I never mentioned Professor Snape, since you automatically jumped to his defence it makes me wonder why you immediately thought of him. This bears further investigation but I was actually referring to a different dangerous death eater who's currently hiding in the Slytherin dorms."

Snape couldn't keep quiet any longer, "Preposterous, more of Potter's lies aimed to discredit me. I want him charged with slander, libel and defamation of character."

Harry was enjoying himself, "I will agree to that if, when we find this death eater in the Slytherin dorm, Snape here is charged with aiding and abetting a wanted criminal."

"There are no wanted criminals in Slytherin!" Snape was now shouting.

McGonagall decided to stir the cauldron, "Mr Potter, I fail to see what your involvement in this matter is?"

"If you would accompany us down to the Slytherin dorm I'm sure you'll understand why it concerns me professor, I made the discovery using a family heirloom and contacted someone I trust to deal with the matter. Which reminds me, headmaster, you have a Potter family heirloom that my father loaned you. Please see it returned to me before I have to add that to the growing list of charges we will be bringing against you."

Snape was on his feet, "No one will be entering the Slytherin dorms without me being there!"

Hermione smiled sweetly at the angry man, "Wouldn't dream of it professor, we want you to see for yourself just how wrong you are."

Snape stormed from the hall with Amelia, the Potters, Minerva and Albus following close behind. Before leaving, the head of the DMLE gave an order that brokored no argument. "Everyone is to stay in the hall until we return. Anyone who doesn't will find themselves in serious trouble, and I'm not talking house points."

They found the marauders and aurors waiting for them outside the snake's den, it was time to spring the rat trap.

-oOoOo-

Peter Pettigrew was currently a dirty rat, ever since he'd entered the Slytherin dorm Wormtail had been shitting himself. His new owner Ron was not too concerned about taking care of his own personal hygiene, far less expend the time and effort to clean out his pet's cage.

The boy had also kept the cage locked tight as his dorm mates had threatened to decorate Ron's bed with rat entrails, the certainty that they weren't joking led directly to Peter's condition. The moment the cage was open he would be off and running, until then he was a trapped rat as he couldn't transform back to human while confined.

His dreams of freedom were shattered by a voice he hadn't heard for over a decade, "Hello Peter, surely you knew if the death eaters didn't kill you then we would."

Harry interrupted his godfather, "Madam Bones, can I have your personal assurance that Peter Pettigrew will see justice administered swiftly? Otherwise we are going to kill a rat right now."

The rodent cowering in the corner of the smelly cage had Amelia wanting to kill the creature herself, that it had instantly reacted in fear at the sound of Sirius's voice convinced her this was indeed Peter Pettigrew. "You have my word he will be tried today if we can manage it, tomorrow at the latest. He will be guarded around the clock and we'll even include a few kneazle minders as well."

Sirius stunned the rat before unlocking the cage and levitating the rodent onto the floor, He and Remus performed the spell together that transformed the rat into Peter.

Remus cast a spell to disarm the unconscious death eater when two wands shot into his hand, Harry hadn't expected this turn of events and had to be restrained by Hermione.

Sirius caught his actions and wondered what the problem was, "What's the matter kiddo?"

"That's Voldemort's wand, this piece of filth must have been in the house that night when his master killed mum and dad. I vote we do him now!"

Dumbledore felt as if he was drowning, the shocks were hitting like waves and just seemed to keep on coming, "How could you possibly know that Harry?"

Harry had to think on his feet, "I remember my mother begging with Voldemort to kill her instead of me, when she wouldn't step aside, that wand cast a green curse at her. It then cast a green curse at me, I would know that wand anywhere."

His revelation had shocked everyone, Harry used those few seconds to grab the wand out of Remus's hand and snap it. Ensuring that it broke cleanly and couldn't be repaired, not even by Dumbledore using the elder wand.

Amelia's tone was cold as ice, "Mr Potter, you have just destroyed evidence!"

"No I haven't, it is still clearly Voldemort's wand. I just made sure it would never be used to harm another person again, if anyone has the right to snap his wand then it's me." Amelia had also lost family to this wand and, the more she thought about it was actually delighted it would never be used again.

Harry turned to the head of Slytherin, "There is your death eater Snape, hiding in the Slytherin dorm. Makes a mockery of your slander claim, don't you think?" Harry wasn't supposed to know that the rat had spent the last four years in the Gryffindor dorm so was saying nothing.

The aurors were fitting multiple restraints to Pettigrew and stunned him again for good measure before Amelia dropped the bombshell, "Professor Snape, I'm going to have to ask you to accompany me to the ministry and undergo questioning."

Snape's face drained of colour as Albus tried to save him, "Amelia I hardly see the need for that, I trust Severus..."

Dumbledore was interrupted by the head of the DMLE, "That is neither here nor there Albus, I have a wanted death eater found hiding in a facility that is supervised by a known 'former' death eater. There is no room for manoeuvre here, Severus will be questioned. To whom does this creature belong?"

Snape was once more wondering why the world hated him so much, the first ever Weasley sorted into Slytherin and he brings a pet death eater along to keep him company! "Ronald Weasley."

Amelia was left shaking her head, poor Arthur just couldn't catch a break. "Well since his parents are out off the country and his head of house is also under suspicion, I need to know what other options we have available?"

Minerva supplied the necessary information, "Arthur Weasley nominated Muriel Prewett to act on his children's behalf while he and Molly are out of the country."

The grimace on Amelia's face told its own story, "I will ensure she is contacted as we'll have to take the boy for questioning as well."

"I shall go and fetch my cloak," Snape left before Harry drew Amelia's attention to something.

"Madam Bones, is it possible to counter the effects of veritaserum and would a potion's master know how to do it?"

A pair of aurors raced after Snape without having to be told, "Yes Mr Potter, it is indeed possible. The defence against this is to keep the suspect isolated and administer flushing potion for three days. I think Hogwarts is going to be missing its potions professor until at least the weekend."

Albus was still concentrating on what Harry said earlier to be too bothered by that statement, "Mr Potter, would you really have killed Peter Pettigrew?"

Harry was still angry at the discovery that Peter was there that horrific Halloween to pander to Dumbledore's feelings and beliefs, "I'll answer that question with one of my own, is there anyone in this room that believes Lucius Malfoy is not a death eater?"

"I fail to understand..."

Harry cut him off, "Lucius Malfoy IS a death eater yet escaped justice, this thing lying here helped murder my parents yet my godfather was the one who ended up in Azkaban. The only reason he's still alive is that I trust Madam Bones, otherwise I would have exterminated the rat and lost no sleep over it whatsoever."

Dumbledore was staring at Harry as if he were Tom Riddle reincarnated, he decided to burst the old goat's bubble. "In the environment you personally placed me to be raised, there was no forgiveness practiced anywhere in that house. That was where I learned the lessons that I will live my life by. I will deal with people according to their behaviour toward me and my family, and so their actions will determine how I treat them. By his own standards Pettigrew doesn't deserve to live. I will never be the aggressor but if someone hurts me or mine then I will respond in kind."

Hermione interrupted him, "Now Harry, you know that's not right. It should be my wife and I will respond in kind!"

Albus had thought for a moment that Mrs Potter was going to contradict her husband, instead, she intended to be by his side as they seek retribution on those who did them harm. "Having no forgiveness in your heart is the first step on the road to darkness."

Hermione was ready for him, "The other side of the coin is that if you forgive everyone, no matter how feeble their excuse, then the whole concept of justice is eroded to the point of collapse. When you start 'rewarding' people by making twenty-year-olds, with no teaching experience, head of a Hogwarts house then that takes forgiveness to a whole new extreme. We have worked within the laws of the land to ensure anyone doing the Potters wrong, including you headmaster, won't get away with it. "

A female auror entered with Ron, whose gaze immediately noticed the empty cage. "What the bloody hell happened to Scabbers and who is he?"

Amelia pinned him with a stare, "He, Mr Weasley is an illegal animagus who was masquerading as your pet, I really need to hear how he came to be in your possession."

Ron looked ready to lose his breakfast at the thought of this balding man sharing a room with him, "I got Scabbers off my brother Percy, he had him for years but now has an owl."

"We will collect your brother on the way out, you will be accompanying us to the ministry." Amelia led them back to the main hall, they would be portkeying as a group directly to the ministry. Sirius was going to walk to Hogsmead and then apparate back to the Grangers, they would be desperate for news. He couldn't help but hug both Potters, not only was he now free but the rat was well and truly caught. He whispered a 'thank you' as he pulled them close, now all he had to do was work out who this mysterious woman was that Moony marries.

-oOoOo-

Cornelius was reading the report Amelia had just handed him and all he could think of was 'thank Merlin we have a scapegoat!'

"So Pettigrew has spent the last four years living at Hogwarts, right under Albus Dumbledore's massive nose. Only the fact that the rat was gifted to a younger brother, who was then sorted into Slytherin, saved us the embarrassment of having a death eater sharing a dorm with Harry Potter. What was the result of Snape's questioning under truth serum, did he know Pettigrew was in the castle?"

"We're not sure whether he managed to take anything that would counteract the effects of veritaserum so he's isolated in a cell, on a purge program for three days."

This raised fudge's eyebrows before Amelia explained, "We never had a chance to question him before, Dumbledore blocked us at every turn. He may trust Snape without divulging the reason why but with the Potters now at Hogwarts I think we need to have that information. If things go pear shaped then I want the ministry to be able to honestly say we did everything in our power to prevent it. As far as I'm concerned Dumbledore's word is no longer a good enough reason for someone being declared innocent."

Cornelius was quite happy to see Dumbledore brought to heel in the name of protecting Harry Potter, his popularity as minister had never been so high since the lad gave him his public support. "So Pettigrew's trial is first thing tomorrow morning, I'm assuming he's well guarded?"

"He's terrified to move, selling out the Potters and having you-know-who's wand on his person means my auror's will hex him if he so much as raises an eyebrow. He may eat breakfast but I very much doubt he'll see lunch!"

This pleased Cornelius, more positive proof that his ministry was decisive and just in its protection of the magical world. Being able to publicly poke Albus one in the eye at the same time was just the cherry on top.

Two Weasley brothers had spent the day being questioned by aurors before being interrogated by their Auntie Muriel, both knew which one had been worse. At least the aurors didn't criticize their parents and wild upbringing every second sentence. With the castle now in sight, the two brothers could finally see an end to the constant verbal blitzkrieg from the woman who was accompanying them.

Instead of feeling relief that their ordeal was almost over, Percy and Ron had both independently come to the conclusion that this was one more stain on them and their family from the Potters. The Potters mere presence in the Slytherin dorm was enough to make it all their fault in the eyes of these two jealous redheads.

Their feelings of anger, leaning toward hatred, may not be based on fact but that didn't make their venom any less toxic. Any opportunity for some payback on the Potters would be grasped with both hands.

-oOoOo-

Horace Slughorn was enjoying his return to Hogwarts, though staying at the Three Broomsticks for now. He was the quintessential Slytherin who used his contacts and influence to get what he wanted. Horace had the biggest prize in the wizarding world within his grasp so was proceeding very cautiously.

His original intention to tutor the Potters and a few of their friends was rapidly heading toward a full time teaching position with the arrest of Snape. Minerva seemed to think she had a ready made replacement though he wasn't sure whether that would be counterproductive to his main goal, adding Harry Potter to the 'Slug Club'.

The enmity between the Potters and the Slytherins was there for all to see, Horace was sure becoming head of that house would have a detrimental effect on his fledgling relationship with the boy. Since he had a prior contract with the Potters he was forced to honour it, therefore excluding the Slytherins from the potions lesson the Potters were paying for.

If Snape wasn't allowed to return then that would be Minerva's problem, he had a signed contract with the Potters to teach them potions at a certain, pre-agreed time and would not be breaking it. She would just have to reschedule the Slytherin's lessons.

Both Potters had impressed Horace with their aptitude and knowledge of potions, with their friends also willing to learn, it quickly became one of the most pleasant first year lessons he could remember teaching.

Hermione was forced to keep a close eye on Harry during potions as his temper was very near the surface, it wasn't as bad as their defence lesson with Quirrell but came close.

Here was the man who knew what Tom Riddle was up to yet never said a word, had he mentioned horcruxes to Dumbledore then the old wizard would have been certain Voldemort wasn't dead and had an extra decade to search for them. Instead he'd lied and even falsified his memory in order to protect his image as a jovial host who everyone wanted to know.

In all honesty the man made Hermione feel sick, she could forgive incompetence, even understand greed but to allow a murdering megalomaniac to survive over some weird kind of vanity almost had her vomiting. That phony smile behind those calculator eyes really turned her stomach.

Still, anything was better than listening to Snape boast how he could teach them how to bottle fame, and if they didn't learn that skill it was their own fault!

-oOoOo-

Albus Dumbledore was having trouble sleeping. It wasn't so much a guilty conscience keeping him awake, more that some of his secrets were going to be revealed when they eventually questioned Severus. While his potions professor's involvement in the Potter deaths would not be well received, the revelation that there was a prophecy in play would be a disaster for Albus.

Having this information, Albus knowingly placing the chosen one into an environment where he would be denied knowledge of magic was indefensible. Not unless he wanted to mention that their saviour had to die because the lad had a bit of Voldemort's soul in his head. Albus really didn't want it becoming known that the only plan he had involved manipulating Harry Potter into willingly letting Voldemort kill the lad.

He'd spent the last two days calling in every favour he was owed to no avail, Amelia was relentless on the need for Severus to face questioning under truth serum and Cornelius was backing her stance. Pettigrew's trial and sentence were quickly dealt with and the former Gryffindor wailed like a baby as he was led to the dementor. Remus Lupin and Sirius Black had sat unmoved as their former friend was half dragged, half carried toward his fate.

Their swift and decisive action won Amelia and Cornelius many plaudits in the press, which also severely hindered his efforts. No one in the ministry or Wizengamot wanted to get caught in the middle of a power struggle between those two and Albus, so the old wizard found himself helpless to intervene.

That the press had apparently declared open season on the headmaster after it was discovered that Pettigrew had been in the castle for the last four years didn't help him either. Albus was

dreading people's reactions from Severus being questioned, with even Minerva now standing up to him, things could only get worse.

He'd planned to try to ingratiate himself with the Potters by returning James's cloak, only for Minerva to piss all over that plan. She'd less than politely advised him that the Potters wanted nothing to do with him and that she would personally pass the cloak onto them. Minerva then told him their plans for flying lessons this week, he was only being informed as he was the headmaster since the deputy headmistress had already decided to allow it.

Harry Potter was bright, powerful, confident, married and had already bonded with his Gryffindor classmates. Both he and his wife looked set to shatter all Hogwarts academic records and were taking the rest of the first year Gryffindors along with them. Augusta Longbottom was worried her grandson may be a squib but the evidence was now clearly stacked against that assumption, how the hell had all this happened?

He had expected a demure, polite, impressionable lad who he would be able to control without any problems, instead his nice stable world had been in a constant state of flux since the sorting.

Now he was going to be forced to approach the boy, cap in hand, and ask if he would be willing to save Severus. If the revelations he expected came to pass, there would be a trial with Harry having a major input to Snape's sentence. If the lad really pushed for it Albus was in no doubt he could see Severus kissed, given the Potters reaction to Peter Pettigrew, Albus feared for his friend's life.

He would try and have a word with them after their flying lesson tomorrow, the trial could be as soon as Monday, given the speed the ministry was working at these days. Albus would need to lay a little groundwork before then.

Presenting Severus in a good light was going to be quite the challenge, were he to stretch certain details and events to suit his case, Sirius and Remus would simply supply the truth of the matter. This would leave Severus and himself in even hotter water, was it any wonder he was unable to sleep?

-oOoOo-

Hermione could actually feel the excitement radiating off her husband as she woke, "What's got you in such a good mood this morning?"

His eyes were almost glowing, "Hermione, not only is this the day we learn to fly a broom but we get to go home for the weekend straight after it! It doesn't get much better than that."

"Am I to assume Neville won't be breaking anything today?"

"Oh Neville won't but that doesn't mean Madam Pomfrey's services will not be required."

She snuggled into him, "Are you going to get yourself placed on the Quidditch team this time around?"

He thought for a moment before answering, "I don't think so, it was always flying I loved, Quidditch just gave me that opportunity. When the new house is finished I'll be able to fly every weekend and at the holidays, I could do without all the injuries I received the last time."

"I for one won't miss sitting in the stand, biting my nails while you almost get yourself killed. We had Riddle jinxing your broom, Dobby jinxing a bludger and not forgetting the special guest appearance by the dementors. All that before we get to the dirty tricks by the Slytherins and Cho making cow eyes at you. I think I'd rather be at home with my husband than watch him defying death to try and win a bit of tin."

Harry couldn't help but chuckle, after the life they'd led a school game of Quidditch just didn't seem so important any more. "What would you like to bet the old man objects to my Gryffindor offer?"

"Well I would say that was as likely as a certain Weasley spending Friday night in the infirmary."

Harry kissed his wife, "You know me too well love, I suppose we'd better get up and start the day?"

Draco had finally begun to act like a Slytherin, instead of continually confronting Potter, he just wound the Weasley prat up like a clockwork toy and pointed him in their direction. Whether Weasley won or lost, it was all good to Draco Malfoy. With the flying lessons today, the weasel thought he finally had something that he could do better than the Potters. They may have read more books than Ron knew existed but that would be merely excess baggage when trying to fly a broom.

The redhead had boasted and niggled at them all day, he wasn't stupid enough to say anything that could be interpreted as a challenge by Potter but he sailed close to the edge once or twice. The entire school knew the story of what Harry had done to Umbridge in the ministry, they didn't know who she was but defeating the undersecretary to the minister of magic was a good enough reason for them to leave the Potters alone.

When the time came to head out onto the grounds, Harry couldn't hide his disappointment at the brooms laying there waiting for them. He was certain the old man would object but thought McGonagall would have been able to force it through.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Madam Hooch barked, "Everyone stand by a broomstick. Come on, hurry up."

It was like the showdown at the O.K. corral as the Gryffindors lined up opposite the Slytherins, only this time Wyatt Earp was intending to use some wandless magic to clean up Tombstone!

"Stick out your right hand over the broom and say, UP!"

Cries of "UP!" rang out along both lines until broken by Ron's sarcastic laughter, "What's the matter Longbottom? Oh sorry, I forgot squibs can't fly brooms."

Malfoy and his goons joined in Ron's laughter until Neville practically growled "UP!" causing his broom to move with speed and force. It didn't actually move up though, instead it shot straight forward and struck its target with amazing accuracy.

Both the distance and quality of broom involved meant that it probably only just reached into double figures for miles per hour, this proved quite fast enough for Ron Weasley as the end of the broom impacted with his groin.

The lanky redhead seemed to collapse to the ground in slow motion, it was also weird to see his mouth wide open with no sound coming out, or food going in. He just lay there quietly, making no noise and not moving an inch, with tears streaming down his cheeks.

Lavender and Parvati were trying to hold back their giggling but none of the guys laughed, Neville though soon changed that. "Oh that must have hurt! Is that why there are cushioning charms on brooms?"

Even the Slytherins were laughing at Madam Hooch's attempts to get Ron to stand on his feet, they were silenced by the appearance of Professor McGonagall.

"It would appear that your concerns over the quality of the brooms available is justified Mr Potter."

Hooch was ready for a rant, "I complain to the headmaster about these every year, and every year I'm told there is no money in the budget to replace brooms. These are the best we have available but I fear it's going to take a student being seriously injured before something is done about this."

Minerva removed a shrunken holdall from her pocket, "Mr Potter has provided brooms for his housemates to learn with, after hearing stories of how bad the school brooms were he purchased a set for Gryffindor. I wanted to see for myself how bad the situation was and am now convinced we need to search for patrons to do the same for the other three houses."

After unshrinking the bag, Minerva began distributing new brooms to her house.

Draco of course couldn't keep his mouth shut, "Cleansweep's Potter? My father would have bought Nimbus two thousand's for Slytherin."

Before any of the staff could say anything, Harry cut Malfoy down to size. "Well that makes your father an idiot, then again we had wondered where you got it from. Giving students who've never flown before top-of-the-line racing brooms is more likely to get them killed than flying the crappy thing you're using."

Madam Hooch agreed, "Mr Potter is quite correct, the Cleansweep is an excellent broom for beginners and I wouldn't allow a novice to sit on a Nimbus. Now mount your brooms and show me your grip."

Professor McGonagall headed off with Ron to the infirmary while Hooch had them all gently kick off and land again. As the lesson progressed, the Gryffindors were growing in confidence. Harry stayed between Hermione and Neville though still managed to keep an eye on the other four and pass on helpful suggestions.

They were about thirty feet of the ground and flying in a very wide circle when Draco dive-bombed the end of their line from above, he was climbing back up when his laughter was terminated by an audible crack. His broom split in two as Draco fell from the sky, making a detour through a tree's branches en route to his painful meeting with the ground.

Hooch ordered them all down when Tracy Davis's ancient broom chose that precise moment to fail without any assistance from Harry, she screamed almost as loud as Malfoy when gravity exerted its fatal pull on her body.

Harry took off like a heat-seeking missile in an attempt to intercept the girl before her face hit the grass, everyone else could only watch in wonder at the scene playing out at speed before them.

Tracy thought she was a goner, her whole life flashed before her eyes and it didn't bloody take long, there was so much more she wanted to do. Suddenly she wasn't falling anymore but looking into the greenest pair of eyes she'd ever seen, Tracy was somehow lying across Harry Potter's broom and his arm was wrapped around her. She realised that the screaming she could hear was coming from her

and closed her mouth, there was nothing she could say to this boy that could in any way express her gratitude.

Harry brought them both into land and Tracy was engulfed in a hug from her best friend Daphne, Harry found himself being shouted at by Pansy Parkinson.

"You save her Potter yet let my poor Draco fall, what are you playing at?"

Harry's eyes bored right through the girl, "Your 'poor Draco' was attempting to unseat some of my friends, he attempted a dangerous manoeuvre that the old broom couldn't handle. Him lying there is entirely his own fault. Tracy on the other hand was just quietly flying along when her broom stopped working, that is why I provided new brooms for my friends."

Tracy Davis came over and knelt at Harry's feet, "Lord Potter, I owe you a life debt and await your request for payment of that debt."

Harry stood straighter, "Miss Davis, as Lord Potter I recognise that debt. As payment, from this day onward, you shall repay that debt by calling me Harry."

He helped an astonished Tracy to her feet, he could have asked anything of her, or the Davis family, yet granted her an easy out. Her eyes sought out Hermione for permission to thank her husband, with a smile and a nod she granted her wish. Tracy kissed Harry Potter on the cheek, "Thank you Harry, you are a gentleman in more ways than one. Hermione is a lucky witch!"

Harry was actually blushing, he pulled Hermione to him. "No Tracy, I'm the lucky one."

None of them had seen McGonagall return and almost jumped when she spoke, "Personally I think Miss Davis is the lucky one. Madam Hooch, I am suspending all flying using school brooms until they can be replaced. Mr Potter your rescue and reactions afterwards are to be commended. Fifty points to Gryffindor for saving a fellow student,

protecting your friends with the gift of brooms, promoting house unity and your actions afterwards that were exemplarily."

Harry was really blushing now, McGonagall almost smiled. "I know you both are setting off home now but please come and see me first thing Monday morning, I need to introduce you to Oliver Wood."

As McGonagall assisted Hooch in getting Draco to the infirmary, Hermione was trying not to laugh. It would seem the more things change, the more they stay the same.

-oOoOo-

Albus was lying in wait for them as the two happy students joked with each other along the corridor.

"Mr Potter, could I have a quick word?"

Harry stopped and gave the old man a hard stare before giving a one word answer.

"Velocity"

The Potters walked away from the confused old man, silently wondering if he'd still be standing there when they returned on Monday.

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 9

Emma was pacing up and down inside the Leaky Cauldron, Sirius had assured her they were fine and Hedwig had also delivered a note from the pair confirming the same, as well as giving her a time when they would be home. While Emma believed the evidence, the mother in her still needed to see Hermione and Harry with her own eyes before she could relax.

The pair exited the floo to find themselves tightly engulfed in Emma's arms. All those times Harry stepped off the express and watched as the other children received hugs from their parents flashed through his mind, now he had someone who love and hugged him.

"I know it seems silly but I just had to see for myself that you were ok, I couldn't wait until you came home."

Harry was revelling in the experience of a mother's love, the fact that it was Emma Granger and she loved him as 'just Harry' made it all the sweeter for him.

Emma began to notice her surroundings, "Eh Hermione, Why is everyone staring? Surely parents hug their children in the magical world?"

Hermione was struggling not to laugh, "It's not you mum, rather the person you're hugging. People stare at my husband all the time, you'll get used to it."

Emma wasn't sure how to feel about this, of course she'd heard Harry was famous in the magical world though this was her first time encountering the phenomenon. After the fourth person had approached them her mind was made up, Emma didn't like it!

She experienced more of the adulation as they entered Diagon Alley, Hermione wanted a 'quick look' in Flourish and Blotts. Emma gave her daughter a time limit of an hour, they still had to drive home.

Harry cornered Emma for a private word, "I'm going to disappear for a few minutes, I need to get something for Hermione. This will be her

first birthday as Mrs Potter and I might just be able to find the perfect gift for my wife."

Hermione didn't notice he was gone. Fourteen books later she was ready to leave but couldn't fail to notice the large smile on her husband's face, it was also hard to miss the way his arms were hiding something behind his back.

"I know it's not your birthday until Wednesday but this couldn't wait." From behind his back Harry produced a pet carrying basket that contained a kitten, a kitten that from first glance was unmistakable.

"Crookshanks!"

"I didn't know if he would be there yet, the little guy ambled straight over to me. He appeared to understand I was there to buy him."

Hermione now had the carrier in her hands and was talking through the bars to a clearly delighted kitten. "Oh he's such a clever boy, even as a baby he's the smartest cat in the country. Aren't you Crookshanks? Not as clever as your daddy though."

A happy, if somewhat bemused Harry was kissed in thanks. "Eh Hermione, Daddy?"

"Well Harry you have to get some practice in before the real thing comes along."

Harry thought his face couldn't get any redder, or his smile any wider until Emma hugged them both. "That sounds great, just not for a good few years yet. I'm thirty five and don't want to be a grandmother before becoming forty!"

Hermione's eyes practically glazed over, "That would make me seventeen, I can live with that."

Harry was sure he was going to do an impression of Marge Dursley, floating right out of the shop and off into the sky. He felt lighter than he did when flying his broom earlier.

Dinner that night was fun, Dan kept making disparaging remarks about Crookshanks. His claim that he had been hoping to miss out on the bloody cat this time wasn't fooling anyone, he was just as likely to slip the ginger ball of fur some food as anyone else at the table.

Hermione was ignoring her father's comments and instead asked Sirius a question, "Did you invite the Tonks' over for dinner on Sunday?"

"Yes they're coming, it was good to see Andi again. I'd only met Ted a handful of times and their daughter has grown into a beautiful young woman, who just happens to hate her first name. She insists everyone calls her Tonks."

That brought a smile to Harry's face, "Yeah we know, Remus was also invited and definitely coming."

This puzzled the marauder for a minute, "Why did you invite...no bloody way! I'm her head of house and won't allow it."

Sirius found himself thrown from his chair and pinned to the wall by an invisible, yet very powerful force, Harry's expression as he faced his godfather was one of pure fury. "You will do nothing and say nothing, this doesn't concern you. You were dead by the time they got together and will not interfere this time either."

Harry felt a pair of arms go comfortingly around him, they were not his wife's. "Harry this is not the way. Sirius doesn't know what's going on yet you are expecting him to make decisions based only on you saying it needs to be so. You both told me that was the way Dumbledore treated you and Hermione, you have to give him the relevant information."

Harry settled into Emma's embrace, her words had knocked all the fight out of him. To Harry, being compared to Dumbledore was nearly as bad as being likened to Voldemort. One bastard had sent him into the forbidden forest to die while the other had done his best to accomplish the deed.

As her mother hugged Harry, Hermione approached Sirius. "Sirius, what would you do to save your godson's life?"

He looked directly into Harry's green eyes before answering, "Anything!"

Hermione had expected no other answer, "And if you could give him back his parents?"

Sirius was now struggling to speak as his emotions swam very near the surface, "Hermione I would gladly give my life to bring back either of them. James was like a brother to me while Lily was a wonderful witch who we all adored."

Hermione knew this was painful but the point had to be made, "Before his first birthday, Teddy Lupin had lost his mother, father, grandfather and godfather. Harry had made arrangements so he would be financially taken care of but we all know how well that worked out for my husband. Andi was a broken woman who clung to that baby like a security blanket, apart from Teddy her entire world had been destroyed."

Harry started speaking, drawing strength from still being held in Emma's arms. "Tonks was in the room of requirements, even though she was a fully trained auror, Remus refused to let her fight in case anything happened to him. I asked her to leave the room so it could be changed into something else, she joined the battle and her aunt Bellatrix killed her."

Harry was struggling to keep his emotions under control as he gave voice to one of his greatest fears. "Coming back in time has probably killed my godson, the changes we've made and continue to make see the chances of him ever being born decrease almost daily. The war made it possible for his parents to connect so, as we have no intention of letting things get to that stage, we are trying desperate measures. It's highly unlikely that we will ever be using Grimmaud Place as a hideout and Dumbledore can stick his order of the phoenix right up his wrinkly old arse."

Godson and godfather had tears streaming down their cheeks now, "We love both Tonks and Remus, our intention is to have them in our company as often as possible. It may have been the war that brought them together but the spark had to be there or it never would have worked. We're just going to have to do the best we can with what we've got. Tonks was the one who chased after Remus, he thought she was too young, too beautiful and way too good for someone with his furry little problem. He loved her with all his heart though and she gradually wore him down, forcing the stubborn bugger to accept he could be happy."

Harry was now openly sobbing and struggling to remain coherent, "I held my godson in my arms the day before Hermione and me were killed, we invited Andi over here for Christmas dinner with the intention of coaxing her to return to Australia with us. There was nothing left for any of us in Britain."

Emma passed Harry to Sirius as both of them were now openly crying, "Sirius, it was the best feeling in the world to hold my godson. He changed his hair and eyes to match mine, he looked like my son. When Hermione held him, Teddy did the same with her and everything I ever wanted in life was standing right in front of me. Teddy Lupin was the reason I finally pulled my finger out and asked my Hermione to be my wife."

Hermione joined their embrace as Harry continued, he needed to get this off his chest. "By coming back in time I might have killed my godson and it's eating me away. I can't do a Dumbledore and console myself this is a greater good scenario because I don't think it is."

Hermione was holding Harry tightly as she continued the explanation for her husband. "What you need to understand is that Teddy was a symbol of hope, a beacon to the light side of what we were fighting for. We wanted a world where an auror and a werewolf could marry and be allowed to raise beautiful children in peace, we fought with everything we had yet ended up with a society more bigoted and perverted than we have now."

Harry was trying to regain control of himself, "I'm sorry I attacked you Sirius but Teddy is one of the most important people for us to help.

Unfortunately he's also the only one I'm powerless to do anything about."

Sirius also apologised, "I'm sorry to Harry, I was reacting again without engaging my brain. Moony will make a good husband and a wonderful father."

Harry was drying his eyes with a hanky Emma had quietly slipped him, "He does Sirius but both of them are very clever and sharp as tacks. Neither of us has the subtlety needed for this situation so please don't say anything. If any sparks between them become apparent, you can then use that famous Black charm to let Remus know you approve."

Sirius held his godson at arm's length, "I keep forgetting you're really eighteen, though don't think for a second I'm letting that subtlety comment pass me by."

Hermione followed her mother's example and slipped Sirius a hanky, "It's not the years Sirius, it's the mileage. We packed an awful lot into every one of those seven and a half years we were together."

Sirius kissed Hermione on the forehead before turning to Dan, "How did you manage to get two such wonderful women in your family?"

Dan had deliberately stayed out of the argument, he could tell there was something really bothering Harry and it was now out in the open. In Australia they had grown quiet close, Harry had needed someone to unload all the shit he'd been carrying around with him for years and Dan had become that someone.

Hermione had done the same with her mother and between the two of them, the parents began to see the whole picture. The revelation of what had happened to his girl had almost broke Dan, by this time he knew Harry well enough to know his reaction would have been exactly the same as Dan's, a redhead would have to die.

Both Emma and Dan had detected a change in Harry when he came back from visiting the Tonks, they now understood he was trying to find the courage to ask Hermione to be his wife. Both parents would

have been ecstatic with that news, heading back to Australia with the Tonks for company and a wedding to plan. Instead, almost seven and a half years was wiped out, Dan and Emma had been so fixated on the kids they'd hardly given a thought to the likelihood of Teddy not being born.

Harry Potter was an extremely deep young man, Dan was glad that he at least now appeared to be opening up to Hermione. It was blatantly obvious she knew exactly why he reacted the way he did. Before she would have known what he was feeling but not necessarily why, Harry did exactly the same with Hermione. They supported one another unconditionally, understanding that they would be told what the problem was sooner or later. That they could talk things through had really moved their relationship to a whole new level of support, though Dan would bet their house that Emma was already working on ways to get Tonks and Remus together.

Dan answered Sirius as truthfully as he could, "Pure luck Sirius, I'm the luckiest guy in the world."

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Harry awoke to find his wife entwined with him, their limbs interlocking as she attempted to hug every part of him simultaneously. Last night had been emotionally draining but strangely cleansing as well, there were now four people who knew his greatest fear with each of them pledging their help and support. Harry hadn't realised how much he'd enjoyed and needed his chats with Dan until they were no longer there, he intended to reinstate them as soon as possible and may even include Sirius.

Due to his physical age they no longer had the option of disappearing down the pub for a pint and a few games of pool, this didn't mean they couldn't head off to a river bank for a spot of fishing or take in a Quidditch / football match. Harry was learning that he had trusted people he could air his problems with and receive helpful advice, before unconditional support had only come from the girl he currently held in his arms.

The knowledge that he would wake up like this with Hermione in his arms for the rest of his life had started Harry's day with a smile since their return. Truth be told, after the emotional rollercoaster of last night, he could quite happily spend the full day lying here snuggling with his wife.

The thought of having to spend time with Ginny Weasley was no encouragement to get out of bed but Luna was expecting them, and it would be a cold day in hell before Harry or Hermione deliberately let down Luna Lovegood.

Hermione had been watching her husband as the thoughts ran through her mind, she gave him a kiss that focused his attention on the here and now. "You looked a little lost there love, thinking about last night?"

"Actually, I was thinking that if we didn't have to meet Luna today I could have happily spent the day like this. Just lying here holding my beautiful new wife might be my new patronus memory."

Hermione rested her forehead on his, "Harry you shouldn't say things like that, it'll go straight to my head."

"Hermione, the only person I know whose worse at telling lies than me is you, I love my beautiful wife with all that I am. When I saw you holding Teddy it was the most moving experience of my life, next morning I was at Gringotts for that ring you like so much."

She snuggled in for another kiss before emitting a sigh, "I would love to lie here all morning cuddling you but a couple of young ladies are looking forward to going on a picnic with Harry Potter. Mum told me last night, she's checked the weather forecast and is packing a basket full of muggle treats."

Harry couldn't help but smile, "Introducing young witches to the delights of sugar free snacks is one way to control Ginny's ardour."

"You let me worry about Ginny's crush, I'm more worried that you're corrupting my mother. She's bought all normal snacks and drinks, mum now claims there are more important things in life than the risk

of a few cavities. She still reminded me to floss though so you haven't totally corrupted her yet."

Harry was stunned into silence, it was just beginning to dawn on him that perhaps he had impacted on the Grangers as much as they had changed his life beyond all recognition.

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Ginny was pacing up and down the Lovegood's living room, glancing at the fireplace every few seconds in a fair imitation of Emma Granger at the Leaky Cauldron the day before.

"Ginny, could you please stop getting your knickers in a twist over this. You've met them before and they're nice people."

"Yes I've met them before, the station, Hogwarts and then my dad having to petrify my mother so she wouldn't attack them in the pub. Hermione had her hand on her wand the entire time we were in the Leaky Cauldron, talk about making a good first impression."

Luna shook her head at her friend and now roommate, "Ginny just be yourself, stop worrying about what they'll think. Let them see the real Ginny Weasley, my best friend."

Ginny stopped her pacing and stared directly at Luna, "What if I don't know who the real Ginny is? What if I don't like her and want to change?"

Luna could see her friend was working herself into a state, "Ginny, we're ten, we change almost daily. I'm just concerned you're trying to be someone you're not. I like the idea of reading books and studying but it has to be because you want to do it, not to impress someone else."

"Luna, I am doing this for me! There is so much more to life than what my future was supposed to be. This Ginny Weasley will not be a stay at home wife who has a husband that gets sent out to earn the upkeep of an ever increasing family. I refuse to be another Molly Weasley."

Ginny then noticed that Luna wasn't looking at her, rather at a spot behind her. "The Potters are here, aren't they?"

Luna gave a big smile and enthusiastically nodded.

Ginny groaned, "How long have they been standing there, why didn't you tell me and will someone just kill me now?"

Ginny heard Hermione's voice from behind her, "Please excuse me for saying this Ginny but not wanting to become another Molly Weasley is a cause for celebration in my book. I know she's your mother and I'm grateful that even you think one of her is enough. Now how about showing us around?"

Luna sprang up and grabbed Harry by the arm before beginning to drag him out the house. "You'll have to excuse Ginny, she has a bad infestation of hero worship that has her acting all confounded."

Harry wanted to put an end to this quickly, before elbows ended up implanted in butter dishes. "I'm nothing special Luna!"

Luna was beaming a smile at him and ignoring all efforts of Ginny to get her to shut up. "Oh I agree Harry, but it's your wife she thinks is absolutely brilliant and holds up as a role model."

Ginny had both her hands covering her face, valiantly attempting to hide her embarrassment while wishing the ground would open up and swallow her. She missed the looks of utter amazement that were being worn by both the Potters. Ginny was too busy thinking that she had six brothers, why the hell did she ever want a sister?

Luna was giggling like mad as she led / dragged a confused Harry from the house, leaving Hermione with the decision of whether to just follow on or talk to the clearly mortified, face- hiding redhead. She decided to give the girl a chance, "So Ginny, are you enjoying staying with Luna?"

She removed her hands from her blushing face, "Up until a moment ago, I was. My other option was my Auntie Muriel, I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy."

Hermione visibly winced at her memories of the woman, Ginny noticed though which forced Hermione to come up with an explanation. "Every family has one, mine is my Auntie Agnes, I think I would prefer an orphanage to staying with her. Shouldn't we be going? Luna has just made off with my husband."

"That's Luna," Ginny was smiling before becoming serious, "She can seem a little quirky but that's just who she is. Her mother died almost a year ago and it affected her greatly. The Weasleys and Diggorys were the only other magical families that lived in this area and she's been so lonely. Luna's been very excited by the thought that you are moving here and want to be her friends, please don't make fun of her if she says something strange."

Hermione took Ginny by the arm and started leading her toward the door, "Not a chance Ginny, not a chance."

Luna meanwhile was telling Harry why Ginny thought Hermione was such a good role model, and explaining that she'd dragged him out of there to give the two of them a chance to talk to each other. "It was either that or Ginny would spend the entire day following Hermione around like a little lost poppy, blushing like mad every time your wife looked in her direction."

Harry couldn't help but stare at the little blond in admiration, "Luna Lovegood, you are an extraordinary young witch and I hope we can be the very best of friends for many years to come."

Ginny and Hermione came across the pair to find Luna wrapped around Harry and hugging him for all she was worth. Ginny was concerned for her best friend's health until she spotted the huge grin Hermione was wearing.

"I have only one rule, if you hug my husband then you need to hug me as well." This was probably the wrong thing to say as Luna pounced on her.

"Harry said you wanted to be our friends?"

Hermione was positive Harry had said they wanted to be her friend but, in typical Luna fashion, she'd extended the offer to include Ginny as well. Both Potters were determined this version of Luna Lovegood would not grow up friendless.

"Of course we do, now can you lead us to the building site. My mum made us a picnic basket for later."

Ginny was understandably apprehensive about visiting the site of her former home, when they arrive she received quite the shock. Not only were all traces of her former home obliterated, the entire landscape had been changed. Trees had been magically uprooted and planted precisely where the Potter plans stipulated they should be, a Quidditch pitch was being constructed with seats for viewing being built up the hillside. The water hole was gone because the new house would have a pool and the orchard had also been moved to become part of a massive back garden. A real road now approached the building and ended at a triple garage that would have a self contained flat above it.

Harry and Hermione were explaining all this to their new friends but they were slightly overawed.

Ginny had stayed here her entire life yet didn't recognise the place, she wasn't sure whether to be happy or sad at that. Her life had changed so much and here was visual proof that it was permanent, there could be no going back because there was nothing but memories to go back to.

Harry and Hermione were delighted with the progress, they'd paid the builder extra to get the job completed faster. The fact that the customer was Harry Potter saw the builder's entire workforce concentrating on this one job, the prestige of being chosen to build the Potter home would see their order books swell. They wouldn't even have to advertise, there were only so many magical builders in Britain and the word had already spread.

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Harry was walking back down Stroat Hill after having a wonderful day when he really looked at their new property laid out below them. This elevated view allowed him to see the extent of the land they'd bought as well as their new home beginning to rise out of the ground. This combined with a day like no other had Harry thinking this was worth fighting for.

The picnic had thrown up many firsts, Luna and Ginny had their first taste of pizza, Coke, Mars bars and other treats Emma had packed in their basket. The day had also contained firsts for both Potters, throwing a Frisbee with friends and just acting like kids was something neither had done the first time around.

Harry was aware that they would have to change attitudes if they wanted to bring positive changes to their world in Britain. Luna and even Ginny were always likely to come down on their side in any battle of hearts and minds, but that wasn't going to be enough. He had an idea how to start making changes though and from a small acorn a giant oak tree grows, he could only hope to provide the right conditions for the seed to germinate.

"Luna and Ginny, it's Hermione's birthday next week and I'm planning something rather special. I would like to invite both of you along for the weekend. We could meet in the Leaky Cauldron and you can stay with us in Crawley, do you want to go?"

Harry found himself wearing two winks before Luna then went and hugged Hermione, "I've never been to a party before, thanks for inviting us."

Ginny followed her friend's example before gushing, "We used to have tea and cake when it was one of our birthdays but we never actually had a party!"

Hermione could only shake her head and smile, "I'm sorry girls but you know as much as I do, this is the first I've heard of a party as well." All three girls then turned to face Harry.

"Well since I've just thought of it, that's perfectly understandable. I was thinking of speaking to mum and dad to arrange a surprise party and then my plans just got a lot grander. We'll have a party on Friday night and then spend all day Saturday at a theme park. I also wanted to get all our Hogwarts friends out the castle for the day as well. If we talk to the muggle studies professor we might be able to swing it as an educational trip." Harry could see the excitement build with the three witches. "With mum, dad, Sirius, Remus and maybe even Tonks, there should be more than enough adults to cover the group."

Ginny was almost hyperventilating from anticipation, a party, a sleepover and a visit to... "What's a theme park?"

Hermione understood what her husband was trying to achieve, a crash course in muggle studies for youngsters who'd no idea what they were letting themselves in for. Purebloods and roller coasters should be an interesting combination. "Think of it like a giant fairground Ginny, roundabouts, swings and rollercoaster's. The only problem might be some of the more exciting rides have a height restriction, you have to be a certain height to board them."

This would probably exclude Ginny from most of them though she didn't really care, just being there would be good enough for her.

"We can book to have a party with food and cake as part of the day, once you're in the park all the rides are free. With lunch provided we can stop somewhere for fish and chips on the way home."

Hermione loved how thoughtful her husband was and just had to kiss him in thanks.

Luna watched as the couple kissed with their under construction home as a backdrop. She had a feeling that being friend's with the Potters was going to be life changing, Luna couldn't wait!

-oOoOo-

Fudge was reading another confession that Amelia had just presented him with, if anything this one was harder to read than Pettigrew's. How did they let things become so bad? Here was an

individual who, by any criteria you wished to use, should have spent time in Azkaban. Instead, he was spared and even allowed to work with children, all on the word of one man, Albus Dumbledore. There was no defence put forward, no 'I was under the Imperius Curse', just Dumbledore saying he wasn't a death eater made him a free man.

Cornelius couldn't help but conclude that the prophecy mentioned was at the core of everything Albus had done. How could he not only protect Snape, but employ him while little Harry Potter was living in a cupboard was the question the minister needed answered.

The list of names that followed was also disturbing, that it was almost identical to the list they received from Pettigrew added credence to the claim they were all death eaters. Amelia was standing waiting on her orders and Cornelius realised this was the moment that would define his time as minister. The decisions taken here and now would reflect on how history would remember him. Deciding to be as honest and open as possible Cornelius asked Amelia to sit as he laid out his orders.

"Ok we have to temper our response to this and withhold action that might tear our world apart, here's what I'm thinking. Let Snape stand trial in front of the Wizengamot, his crimes will be made public and they can decide his fate. That's the way the system is supposed to work."

Amelia was nodding her agreement which was always encouraging, "I want you to deal with Lord Potter personally regarding this prophecy, preferably before the trial to give him an opportunity to collect it before the matter becomes public knowledge. I also want him informed it was Snape who pointed you-know-who in his direction, this action led directly to the murder of his parents. I feel the Wizengamot would allow him to lead in what punishment should be meted out to Snape. This will also air more of Dumbledore's dirty laundry, he was directly involved with all the major players that night. Snape was his spy, Pettigrew was in his order, as were the Potters and Sirius Black. I also can't help wondering why he sent Hagrid, if he suspected an attack why send a gamekeeper who can't perform magic? It's time we learned what the old goat thinks only Albus Bloody Dumbledore is smart enough to know."

Amelia Bones was astonished, all this good publicity about taking a tough stance seemed to go straight to the minister's head. The head of the DMLE was wise enough to know she was never going to get everything she wanted but was already way ahead of where she thought she would be. It was the list of names that was going to be the sticking point.

Fudge was expecting arguments about those named so decided to explain his reasoning, "Were we to go after every name on those lists it would create havoc in our society, causing a rift that we may never recover from. For all intents and purposes, those named have behaved like upstanding members of the magical community for the last decade. What I will say is that if any of those named are arrested for anything, your department can question them under truth serum. As long as they behave themselves we'll live and let live, they step over the line and you have my permission to bring the full weight of the ministry down upon their heads."

This was a lot more than Amelia expected to get, to be fair to the minister this was a problem he had inherited. While she wasn't happy about the situation, she could see some merit in his explanation. "Letting sleeping dragons lie is one thing minister, what about those named who work for the ministry? Were these facts ever to become known, there is no fall-back position from having death eaters working for us."

Fudge pondered for a moment before proposing a solution, "What if all employees were required to take a loyalty oath? We can introduce the new initiative in your department before rolling it out to encompass the entire ministry. We can word it in such a way that it would be impossible to belong to an organisation that intended to overthrow the ministry." He was becoming more enthusiastic as the thoughts solidified into a plan in his head, "This would also deny any future dark lords a foothold in the government. After the ministry we can take on the Wizengamot, they would have a hard time refusing when every ministry employee had already complied."

Amelia left the minister's office with a large smile on her face, if Fudge kept this up she might even vote for the arse. She didn't know

whether it was the absence of Umbridge, Malfoy being on both lists or the ringing endorsement from Lord Potter. Whatever the reason Cornelius had grown a backbone and was finally acting like a minister for magic. There was something Amelia Bones never thought she would see.

-oOoOo-

Sunday night's dinner was going splendidly, Sirius and Remus were keeping the entire company entertained with stories that were becoming more outlandish with the amount of wine they consumed. Nymphadora was laughing so hard her hair was changing colours, the Granger parents had heard stories of this phenomenon but viewing it live was another matter.

Harry floated his theme park idea, both Remus and Tonks were very happy to come along. Hermione had been taken to Thorpe Park by her parents when she was older and had loved it, Harry had based his whole idea on his wife's description of how much she'd enjoyed her day there. The Dursleys had also visited the park though as usual Harry hadn't been invited.

Emma headed into the kitchen to fetch more wine and was delighted when Tonks followed her in to see if she needed a hand. "Actually I could use some help but not with this. Dan and I were talking to Sirius the other night and he let slip he felt ready to settle down with the right woman. The problem is he's terrified of dating, claims he's been out of the game so long he wouldn't know where to start. Normally I would introduce him to one of my single friends though, while Sirius is in no way prejudice, I think he would be more comfortable with a witch to start with."

Tonks wasn't expecting that but could see the logic behind it, having to spend the last decade in Azkaban would severely dent anyone's self confidence. "I know a couple of girls who are single and one of them might be just his type. Should I see if she's interested?"

"Oh yes, but don't say anything to Sirius yet, let me handle that part. He'll probably just try to talk his way out of it though that man just

loves company." The sound of laughter from the other room proved Emma's point far better than anything she could say.

Tonks was now giggling like a conspiratorial schoolgirl, "Ok, I'll ask my friend but won't say a word to Sirius. He won't know what hit him!"

Tonks had no way of knowing that the broad smile Emma sported was because phase one of her 'Operation Teddy' was under way.

Thanks for reading.

Chapter 10

Remus hadn't spent an evening like this since before those fateful events on Halloween almost a decade ago, great food and even better company had been in extremely short supply for the werewolf. What made the evening extra special was the conversation his abilities allowed Remus to overhear as Sirius was saying goodnight to the Tonks family.

"Thanks for accepting Remus the way you did tonight, his furry little problem usually leads to people judging before they take the time to get to know him."

Nymphadora smiled at Sirius, this was the caring man she remembered and not the monster he'd been portrayed as. Someone who thought of others before themselves could never betray his best friends and his godson, this was the reason she'd agreed to help Emma in her quest. It was a damning indictment of wizarding law and politics though when a first year Hufflepuff could determine that fact yet they couldn't.

"Sirius I was in first year when the Potters were murdered. Because of who my family was, most of the school thought I must be dark due to you and aunt Bella. The rest of them called me a blood traitor as the Tonks family will never support blood supremacy. Add to that me being a Metamorphmagus which I was still learning to control and you can see my time at Hogwarts was anything but pleasant. I could write a book on prejudice so there is no chance of me practicing that which I hate most. Your friend Remus is charming if a little quiet, then again, next to you most people would appear quiet."

Sirius was left to shake his head, "I keep forgetting that everyone has grown up while I was away. You would think that spending time with those two in there would cure me of that."

This caused Nymphadora to laugh, a sound that was almost musical to the listening ears. "Those two are something else, I feel as if I've just been conned into this event on Saturday yet I'm looking forward to it. Weird or what?"

Sirius gave a half-hearted laugh that was filled with nerves, Harry was right again, she was very sharp. "You got off lightly, before you arrived they double teamed Remus into giving them and their friends some defence lessons. It appears that their professor is hopeless and stutters so much he would be dead in a fight before he could say a curse."

This made Nymphadora laugh harder, "I know I'll probably regret this but tell them I'll help as well."

Sirius couldn't believe how well that went, wisely kissing both Nymphadora and her mother goodbye on the cheek before he could say anything to spoil it. He would make his godson eat those subtle comments and enjoy watching the little bugger choke on them.

Remus was drawn from his daydreaming where a beautiful young woman thought he was charming by another beautiful woman.

"We have an empty spare room Remus, why don't you spend the night?"

There was no reason not to accept though Remus had gotten out of the habit of people treating him with kindness. "Thanks for the offer Emma but I really couldn't impose on your hospitality anymore, I've had a wonderful evening."

"Nonsense Remus, it wouldn't be in anyway an imposition, actually it would be doing us a favour. You could then accompany both kids back to Scotland in the morning."

Decision made, Remus relaxed and enjoyed the reminiscing with his best friend.

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When they arrived at the Three Broomsticks there was a reception committee awaiting them. McGonagall, Slughorn and Amelia Bones were all sitting chatting, clearly just passing the time until they arrived.

Harry picked himself off the floor after his usual graceful exit from the floo and was dusting himself down as he spoke, "Professors, Madam Bones, to what do we owe the pleasure?"

Amelia jumped in first, "Lord Potter, Severus Snape has been questioned under truth serum and there is more than enough revelations there to make him stand trial for the crimes he's committed. He also overheard a prophecy pertaining to you and you-know-who, this is the reason why you were attacked as a toddler."

Remus was barely controlling his inner wolf at this news while both Harry and Hermione appeared unperturbed.

This lack of reaction bothered Amelia greatly until Harry offered an explanation, "My dad told Sirius there was a prophecy about me and Voldemort, not the wording as such, just that it existed. They also knew one of Voldemort's spies had reported that fact to him, this was the reason my family went into hiding. We collected the prophecy from the hall of mysteries yesterday morning. Turns out it was made by Sybill Trelawney to a certain Albus Dumbledore, I understand she's never left the castle since. What punishment is Snape likely to receive if found guilty of these crimes?"

"As you are one of the main parties he committed crimes against, the Wizengamot would take into consideration any pleas of clemency or demands for revenge you would make. That is the main reason I decided to meet you here, I suspect Dumbledore will try to influence you toward clemency."

Hermione's grin was frightening, "He tried to have a quick word with us on Friday before we left, we just sped past him. If we need any advice then we are not afraid to ask for it, unsolicited opinions from people who clearly have their own agendas will be ignored."

Amelia was pleased but not in the least surprised to hear that, "We set the trial date for Wednesday, originally to allow you time to collect the prophecy before it became public knowledge. Do you wish to attend the trial?"

Harry didn't need to think before shaking his head, "Wednesday is my wife's birthday, I have no intention of spoiling her day by allowing Snape to intrude. I wonder though if I could suggest a couple of questions though that could be asked during his trial?"

Amelia noncommittally raised her eyebrows at this so Harry continued, "What did you do to earn your dark mark and is it possible to be forced to receive one while under the Imperius curse?"

Amelia could see why Harry would want the second question asked but not the first.

Hermione then proceeded to tell everyone something they didn't know. "We think the dark mark is a perversion of the protean charm that Voldemort uses to tie his followers directly to him forever. To bind the charm each recipient must commit a murder, these are not mere tattoos, rather a way of tying their very souls to their master."

Under the combined stares of amazement Hermione didn't wilt, "It's called 'know thy enemy' and we gathered all the available information before arriving at a theory of how it could be carried out. There is a chance we could be wrong but I doubt it, asking Snape will either confirm or deny our theory."

Amelia was awestruck, "I think it's a safe bet we will be asking those two questions, it would appear Lord Potter your claim that your wife's a genius is well justified."

Harry kissed his wife on the cheek, he was so proud of her. "Madam Bones, you have no idea! Could you please hang on for five minutes? I need a discussion with Professor McGonagall that might require your signature." It was an intrigued Amelia who nodded her compliance.

"Professor, as I said earlier, it is my wife's birthday this week and we require your permission for a little something I've got planned. My intention is to speak with the muggle studies professor concerning a field trip to a muggle theme park this Saturday for most of first year, and a few others. Your security advisor here has already agreed to accompany us, as has auror Tonks. When you include Sirius, our

parents and a professor, that should be more than enough adult support to cover the trip."

Harry could see the questions queuing up in the professor's frown so tried to answer most of them before she needed to ask. "All arrangements and expenses will be dealt with by us, all we would ask of Hogwarts is to transport the students to and from the three broomsticks. They will floo to the Leaky Cauldron where muggle transport will be waiting outside to take them for the rest of the journey. Each envelope contains an invitation and a parental permission slip, that's why I asked Madam Bones if she would consider waiting a few moments. If it's a yes, then Susan's form could be signed here and now,"

Minerva proceeded cautiously, "When you say the most of first year, could you be a bit more specific?"

"Well it really is everyone except Malfoy and his cronies, I don't see why he should be given the chance to spoil my wife's, or anyone else's day. Do you really think he would want to sit on a bus travelling towards a muggle theme park? His father would probably suffer a heart attack if he received a permission slip, honey maybe we should reconsider and invite Draco?"

Minerva wasn't only smiling at the joke, she clearly recognised this was a fabulous opportunity for her students. An opportunity that Hogwarts couldn't afford, far less posses the skill or knowledge required to organise the event. Having met them Minerva was certain that the Granger parents would have this organised to the N'th degree, they took no chances where their children were involved. She could perfectly understand their decision regarding Mister Malfoy, it really would be a shame to deny the others this wonderful opportunity because the blond waster couldn't keep a civil tongue in his head.

"I can understand why you require a quick answer to this as all those invited will need to write home for permission. So, providing Professor Burbage agrees, it's a yes! The permission slips need to be handed to their head of house by Friday. No slip – no trip!"

It was a happy Hermione who took Susan's envelope out her bag so her aunt could sign the all important slip.

Minerva was thinking that this couldn't have come about at a more opportune moment, "Lord Potter, I am trying to persuade Professor Slughorn here to not only teach potions but assume the head of Slytherin mantle. Unfortunately he seems to be of the opinion that this would adversely affect his relationship with you."

Harry stated his position very clearly, "Professor Slughorn has a contract obliging him to teach us potions at specific times until June. Whatever he does outside that time is no concern of mine. I have no axe to grind with Slytherin house, certain members would still be arses no matter what house they were in."

Minerva was aware she should be reprimanding the lad for his language but it was taking all her efforts not to laugh at his jibe concerning Mr Malfoy. The fact that she agreed with his assessment of the blond Slytherin and it also freed Horace to become Head of the little shit's house earned Harry a break. Even if Severus should somehow manage to escape a visit to Azkaban, being found guilty would end his teaching career at Hogwarts, regardless of sentence.

Amelia floored back to the ministry as the Potters had quite the escort back to the castle. When they spied Dumbledore waiting on them, both were glad of their escort's company and stayed close to McGonagall.

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Sirius was on his feet before remembering he wasn't going to do this anymore. Getting his temper back under control before sitting down and taking a deep breath. It was time to discuss that last statement calmly and rationally, "You did what?"

Emma was unconcerned, "I asked Tonks to set you up on a date."

Sirius required a few more deep breaths, that's what he thought she'd said the first time but had to be sure. Calmly discussing remember! "Why the bloody hell would you do that?"

Emma was using her 'explaining to thick parent' voice, this should be good thought Dan who was enjoying the show. Especially since he wasn't the target of his wife's ire.

"Well quite simply, after spending the last ten years in that awful place, all your self-confidence is gone. You're going to wear your best 'puppy dog eyes' expression and say you don't know if you can go through with an actual date. It really is too soon and perhaps you should start with a double date first. It would be a good idea to have some friendly faces there to offer you support and stop you making a total arse of yourself."

Dan could already see where his wife was heading with this, it only confirmed in his mind that Hermione hadn't just inherited her beauty from her mother.

"We will then suggest that Tonks should go with you, she was the one who got you into this mess in the first place. So the poor girl doesn't feel like a spare wheel, Remus can be asked to accompany her. Just as friends of course, on 'your' double date. There is even a chance you might get lucky and actually like who Tonks sets you up with, as far as I can see this is a win-win situation for Sirius Black."

The 'shy' wizard in question had almost to pick his jaw back off the floor as realisation dawned of just what the scheme was. "Oh Emma, that's worthy of a marauder! All the time Moony and Tonks think they are helping me while really we're pushing them to spend time together. With Emma Granger on the case I better start writing my best man speech now."

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Dumbledore was currently so angry the power of speech had temporarily deserted him. Here was the perfect opportunity to wrangle some concessions out of Harry Potter and earn his gratitude when Albus eventually allowed his request. Only to learn the chance had been snatched from his hand by Minerva, this was after physically snatching him before dragging Albus to his office. He

wouldn't be surprised if there was steam emitting from his ears yet Minerva appeared unconcerned.

"As Deputy, school outings are my responsibility. The Granger's are a pair of very respectable and responsible muggle parents who are handling all the arrangements. Each student will have a signed parental permission slip with not one Knut coming out of the Hogwarts budget for the whole event. A professor, our own security advisor and an auror amongst others will accompany them, they even intend to invite a few prefects. The head of the DMLE thought it was a brilliant idea, which gives us ministerial approval, I really fail to see your problem here Albus?"

Minerva was well aware Albus didn't have any problem with the actual trip, his problem was being denied access and influence of the Potters. This proved to be a very accurate assumption.

It was indeed the chance to negotiate with the lad that had Albus seething. He was certain he could have managed at least an endorsement for Severus before granting approval for the trip. He was resigned that Snape's days at Hogwarts were over but had no desire to see the man behind the walls of Azkaban. It was only now beginning to emerge how much he relied on Minerva for the everyday life of Hogwarts, Albus may be the headmaster but his deputy actually ran the school.

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As McGonagall had herded Dumbledore away, the Potters made directly for the great hall. Professor Burbage was still sitting at the staff table so they both made a beeline straight to her. A quick explanation, followed by a glance at the arrangements had her excitedly agreeing in less than five minutes as she poured over the pamphlet for Thorpe Park.

Hermione then made her way to the Ravenclaw table while Harry thought it would be better to get the Slytherins over with first.

Tracy was delighted for another opportunity to call him Harry and intrigued by the envelope she now held in her hands. When Daphne,

Millie, Theo and Blaise also received one, it was time to open it and quench her curiosity. The envelope contained an invitation to a muggle theme park for this Saturday. Along with a permission slip it also contained a colour brochure, displaying pictures of lots of kids their ages having fun. Half of Slytherin had been invited and none of them could fault the Potters for excluding Draco's contingent. The uninvited Slytherins would receive no sympathy from Tracy, she was too busy trying to figure out if she had time to make the owlery before her first class.

Hermione had invited all the Ravenclaw first years before approaching one of their house prefects, "Miss Clearwater, we're organising an official school outing for this Saturday, would you be interested in attending as a prefect?" A quick explanation had Penny excitedly looking forward to Saturday.

Hermione then moved on to the Hufflepuff table, handing them out and needing only to let Susan know why her envelope was already open. Slip in hand, Susan headed immediately for her head of house and Professor Sprout took possession of the first permission slip for the trip.

At the Gryffindor table, Dean Thomas had actually visited Thorpe Park with his parents and couldn't wait to tell everyone how great it was. Excitement was running near fever pitch in Hogwarts, with the Potters at the centre of it once more.

Harry approached the twins with two envelopes, "I'm taking a big chance here with you guys, don't let me down. Padfoot and Moony will be there and your sister says you haven't written once!" Harry was very pleased to hear their first question was about their sister.

"When did you see Ginny?"

"How is she?"

"Hermione and I spent Saturday along with her and Luna, both were fine and will be spending the weekend with us, you'll see her on Saturday." The twins were ecstatic and appeared to radiate happiness, a sight that worried a few of their professors. A day out of

Hogwarts, meet their heroes and see their little sis again. It didn't get much better than that.

It was another Weasley that Harry had his eye on though, especially as Hermione had just approached Oliver Wood.

"Hey Oliver, would you like to go as a prefect on a trip out of school this Saturday? Penelope has already said yes."

Harry wasn't certain how the rest of Percy's organs continued to operate as all the blood in his body appeared to rush straight to his head. You could have fried an egg on his forehead as the rage overtook his features. When Oliver quickly accepted the invitation, Percy stormed out the hall like a man possessed. Neither Potter could quite hide their satisfied smirks, Percy's future contained a lot more pain than losing a badge and a girl. There was no Mrs Penelope Weasley in his future, quite simply he didn't have a future. Both he and his brother Ron were dead men walking.

Draco had treated the whole event with disdain, berating his housemates for going all muggle. Internally he was consumed with rage, first the brooms and now this. Potter was undermining his position in Slytherin house, Crabb, Goyle and Weasley could hardly be considered the cream of the crop. The less said about Pansy the better. It was starting to appear though that this was all that was going to be available to him, the rest of his year group couldn't wait for Saturday. There was no way this situation could be allowed to continue, wait until his father heard about this.

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The Potters found themselves repeatedly being bombarded with questions about Saturday, so much so that they approached McGonagall about using her classroom for a meeting after dinner tonight.

They arrived that evening to find that not only was the room full of students but the muggle studies professor, three heads of house and Albus Dumbledore were all waiting on them.

Since Hermione had visited the park before in their other timeline, she took the lead. "On Saturday morning the horseless coaches will ferry everyone from the castle to Hogsmead, allowing you to floo from the Three Broomsticks to the Leaky Cauldron. A muggle private coach will then be waiting outside to take everyone directly to the park. The maps on your brochures tell you where each of the attractions are, they're all free once you are inside the park."

The excitement inside the room was palpable as Hermione continued, "Some of the rides have height restrictions, this is in no way detrimental to smaller people," as Hermione was looking directly at professor Flitwick as she made this remark it caused some laughter. "The safety harnesses on some of the rides could fail if the person using them was too small. Muggle medicine is a lot slower than Madam Pomfrey, the injuries that Malfoy received on Friday would have seen him confined to a muggle hospital for at least a month."

Harry couldn't resist a jibe, "There is a lot to be said for muggle medicine though, just imagine a whole month without Malfoy!"

Hermione laughed along with everyone else before finishing, "Lunch is being booked at one of the restaurants and we'll stop on the way home for fish and chips or burgers. Mum and dad will have everything booked by now and Hedwig will probably bring us the final details in the morning."

Millicent Bulstrode had to ask what most of them were thinking, "What do your parents do that they can afford all this? It must be costing them a small fortune?"

Hermione was trying not to blush but answered anyway, "They're a type of healer though both are technically unemployed at the moment, they sold their business when we were getting ready to move to Australia. It's actually my husband who's paying for this as part of my birthday celebrations."

Millicent apologised for any embarrassment, "Sorry I didn't mean to pry, I'm just so excited that I probably won't sleep for the rest of the week."

Professor Burbage felt she should really say something here, "This will be the first ever field trip from Hogwarts into the muggle world, the first of many I hope. If anyone needs information about how to behave or even what to wear, I'll be available all week. You can also ask one of your muggle born friends." Bertha would place gold on her getting visits from the Slytherins before the week was out, there were no muggle born Slytherins.

After answering more questions and explaining that the ghost train was probably best avoided, a ghost train without ghosts? The Potters were hoping to make a quick escape but Dumbledore was there for a reason.

"Mr Potter, I really must speak with you!"

Minerva immediately stood beside the pair, visibly offering her support. Harry smiled at their head of house, "What appears to be the problem headmaster?"

Albus knew this was his moment, he had the young man's undivided attention as everyone else had since left. "As you are probably aware by now, Professor Snape is undergoing a trial on Wednesday. I was wondering if you had thought of speaking on his behalf?"

Harry apparently liked his one word answers, "No"

The headmaster didn't attempt to mask his disappointment, "Mr Potter it really is imperative that you learn to forgive your enemies."

"Oh forgive me headmaster, I meant that I hadn't thought about it. Now that you've said professor Snape is my enemy, I suppose I really should say something."

This boy possessed the ability to infuriate Albus like no one since his brother Abe, "That was just a figure of speech Mr Potter, professor Snape is a valued member of Hogwarts staff and a very good friend of mine."

Harry just stood quietly as Albus stared at him expectantly, it was eventually the old wizard who broke the silence, "Well, what do you think?"

"I think sir that you wish me to use my influence to save your good friend, what I fail to understand is why? Surely sir, as head of the Wizengamot, you are not suggesting I use my fame to benefit you and your friend." Harry then became extremely serious, "I have to say I'm very disappointed in you sir, who did you contact to speak on my godfather's behalf? Oh I forgot, he never even got a trial, far less anyone trying to help him."

Hermione's arm snaked around his waist in an attempt to reign in his temper, it helped a little. "I have already informed Madam Bones I will not be attending the trial, neither speaking for nor against the man. There are far too many people pedalling influence to the highest bidder, the Potters are not for sale at any price."

Dumbledore was losing his cool, how dare this little shit tell him how to behave, Albus would be the one doing the telling. "Not even if it meant your little excursion this Saturday was in danger of being cancelled?"

McGonagall was actually growling at this remark but Hermione answered the headmaster, "Since everyone we invited has already written home and the head of the DMLE signed the permission slip of her niece, I would like to hear your proposed excuse to the students and parents. This is, after all an educational establishment and you would be denying your students this experience. All because my husband won't do as you suggest?"

Dumbledore just smirked "A detention cancels your weekend privileges, those are the rules Mrs Potter. You wouldn't like to get a detention now, would you?"

Harry wiped the smirk off his face and took the breath from the old wizard. "The one with the power to vanquish the dark lord approaches. It may have escaped your notice sir but the dark lord of the prophecy is never actually mentioned by name. Trying to force a couple of children under your care to do your bidding is pretty dark.

Then again quite a few of your actions are emerging from the shadows to show you in a different light."

Harry deliberately turned his back on Dumbledore to speak with a McGonagall who was angrier than he'd ever seen her. "Professor, my wife and I will of course abide by school rules. Any fair punishments received will be served. Should we feel the current headmaster manipulated the situation, we will leave this school and these shores never to return."

McGonagall appeared ready to decapitate Dumbledore and seemed only to be waiting on the Potters leaving her classroom before carrying out the deed.

Harry though had parting words for them, "I'm well aware that I could use my position and fame to ensure Snape never sees daylight as a free man again, I choose not to. I am also aware of the prophecy and what it would mean should I leave Britain for good, at the moment we choose not to. Attempting to manipulate us or our friends could make that decision harder to defend against two parents and a godfather who think we should get our arses on the first available plane."

Hermione couldn't resist the opportunity to verbally kick Dumbledore in the stones. "We respond to threats the same way as attacks, we fight back. For a headmaster to be a bully is unforgivable. Is it any wonder people like Malfoy believe they can get away with anything, they're just following your example."

As they left Minerva realised she no longer needed to strike Albus, the Potters parting words had smacked into him like a brace of bludgers. That didn't mean she wasn't going to tear the face off him verbally. "Albus, I worked very hard to get those two back into the castle yet you seem determined to drive them away. Make no mistake, should they leave again that will be it! Can I assume from the expression on your face that scenario would be worse than even I think it would be?"

Dumbledore's voice was barely audible, "Minerva, it would be the end of us all!"

At this point Minerva totally lost it and her Scottish brogue was as broad as it was colourful, "Then why the fuck would you deliberately antagonises them over that miserable bastard Snape? Even without your carefully hidden knowledge I know that the Potters are far more important to our world than that useless arsehole Severus is or ever will be."

Albus faced up to his deputy, "Mr Potter needs to work with me to fulfil his destiny, there is no other option."

Minerva was beginning to think she was going to have to stick her wand up his nose to get his head out his arse. "In your eyes that may be true but you listen to me you old fool. Those kids have plenty of options that don't include worshiping the great Albus Dumbledore and rushing to comply with his every suggestion. Your tunnel vision only sees one outcome regarding the Potters but you have no idea what you're dealing with here."

She reckoned it might take a beater bat to divert Dumbledore from his chosen course, Minerva was considering transfiguring one to use on his stubborn head. "The Grangers would have those kids out the country quicker than you can list your titles, they've sold their business and are ready to leave at a moment's notice. The Potters are bringing a court case against you yet you try to use blackmail to get them doing something against their will."

Albus actually winced at that 'technically correct' term, Minerva wasn't finished yet though.

"They are uniting the houses and have the ear of the minister, Rita Skeeter would probably kill for a chance to talk with them and you pull a stunt like that! My professional opinion is you should pay Poppy a visit for a complete check-up. I would prefer to think you were ill rather than a manipulative old bastard with an unhealthy interest in an eleven year old boy."

She stormed out of her classroom to check on the Potters, leaving a despondent Dumbledore wondering why no one was paying him the respect he deserved.

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Percy Weasley couldn't get his anger under control, the main reason being that he didn't really want to. All those carefully planned dreams that he worked so hard for were now nothing more than that, dreams. He had been exactly on his determined course, made prefect and would have asked Penelope to accompany him for the first Hogsmead weekend. After becoming head boy and then securing a position at the ministry would be the correct time to ask for Penelope's hand. All this lay in tiny pieces thanks to the Potters. The person who got his badge was now spending all day Saturday with his Penelope outside Hogwarts.

Percy had been trying to gather up the courage and ask Penelope to Hogsmead regardless of being badgeless only for the Potters to practically throw her and Wood together. The slights against his family also forced their way into his thoughts and added fuel to what was already a considerable blaze. This was why he was standing in a dark alcove, in sight of the entrance to the Potters accommodation, his wand gripped tightly in his hand.

His intended targets strolled casually into his field of vision, unaware or uncaring about the devastation they had visited upon him. His wand was held steady in the darkness while a curse graced his lips when two things stopped him. A suit of armour stepped out in front of them, blocking his shot and McGonagall's voice ringing down the corridor introduced a modicum of sense into his mind.

"Mr and Mrs Potter, may I speak with you for a moment?"

Percy looked on as his head of house was invited into their accommodation, a shiver of dread passed down his spine at what he'd almost done.

Firing a curse from the darkness wasn't good enough, he wanted them to suffer like he had. He also wanted them to know who was responsible for their pain. Percy melted back into the shadows, making his way back to the Gryffindor portrait by a circular route. He was going to have to give this some serious thought, a quick curse in

the back was too good for them. They needed to learn what it meant to cross Percy Weasley.

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After promising to speak to Wood about Quidditch, Harry and Hermione said goodnight to their head of house at the door. They surreptitiously confirmed Percy was no longer lying in wait. Harry was intending to curse the prat as Charles moved and provided cover, only for McGonagall's appearance to save Percy's life – for now.

He had lifted his wand against Hermione for the last time, it might affect their plans for Ronald but that couldn't be helped. Percy Weasley had just elevated himself straight to the top of their to-do list, he would be lucky to see the weekend.

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Next morning saw the flood of owls being rapidly followed by a steady stream of students taking their signed permission slips to the staff table. Hermione was forced to concede that Sirius had been correct, she had raised doubts that some of the pureblood parents wouldn't allow their children to attend.

He had just laughed at that suggestion, "Hermione, the magical words for pureblood parents are influence and free, this venture supplies both! Their children get to mingle with the Potters and it doesn't cost them a Knut, they will be falling over themselves to sign those slips."

The entire hall was caught up in the excitement, all except five first year Slytherins and a fifth year Gryffindor. Dumbledore was conspicuous by his absence.

Thanks for reading.

Chapter 11

Dumbledore was also conspicuous by his absence as Severus Snape was led into the Wizengamot chamber, things were not looking good for the potions master.

He, along with the rest of those present, received the explanation for the old wizard's absence when Minister Fudge stood to make a statement.

"Albus Dumbledore will play no part in today's proceedings, his word alone was enough to see the accused escape Azkaban without the necessity of a trial. Clearly a conflict of interests exists here."

Snape couldn't hide his shudder at these words, he was counting on the headmaster to ride to his rescue once more.

Fudge continued with his prepared statement, "I also contacted Lord Potter regarding the level of his involvement in today's proceedings, I have here a letter that I intend to read aloud to this chamber."

Dear Minister, I have placed my faith and trust in you, so far I have been delighted with the results. My intention is to do the same with that most august body of witches and wizards, the Wizengamot. I trust they will carry out their duties like the honest and fair-minded people that they are, requiring no input from me in determining what must be done in this case.

Snape could see most of the Wizengamot members sit just that little bit straighter and thought he was royally screwed, that little bastard Potter had managed to claim the moral high ground yet still ensure he was shafted. The minister's next statement left Snape thinking there could be no other result than a cell in Azkaban.

"Many of you will be aware Lord Potter has organised a Hogwarts outing to a muggle attraction as part of the Lady Hermione's birthday celebrations. What you will not be aware of is that he has contacted me with a request for a reciprocal outing to the ministry of magic so the muggle born may receive a better understanding of how our world

works. This is a request I can assure you I took great pleasure in granting."

The nods greeting this news indicated that they all thought this was a good idea, Amelia Bones thought it was such a good idea that it should have already been in place for generations.

Fudge then held them with a steely gaze no one knew he possessed, "When all those children arrive here I for one want to be able to look them in the eye and honestly say I'm doing my best."

Instead of anger, Snape had to admit to a grudging admiration. The lad had managed to get the ministry and Wizengamot on his side with a move worthy of any Slytherin.

The Wizengamot then heard the entire story, how Snape strayed to the dark side and became the death eater's potion brewer. That an overheard interview led to the dark lord discovering there would be a prophesised child. His remorse with the discovery that child belonged to his childhood friend Lily Potter leading to his confession to Albus Dumbledore in the hope of preventing the attack. Snape's claims that the dark lord started to distance himself leaving Severus with no warning of the planned attack that Halloween had to be believed due to the truth serum.

The entire Wizengamot was in a quandary, here was a man who had committed crimes yet tried his best to atone for them. Taking into account the part of the prophecy they heard, it could even be argued that Snape assisted with the demise of the dark lord.

Amelia though had two more questions remaining. "Can you tell this chamber how you earned your dark mark?"

This question was met with total silence until the accused started speaking in that emotionless voice so indicative of testimony under truth serum. What was highly unusual were the tears that ran down his cheeks.

"A muggle family had been captured, I was allocated a boy who appeared to be about fourteen. My orders were to publicly torture the

poor creature before killing him, his murder was used to bond the dark mark that placed me under the dark lord's control."

The silence was eerie as the majority of members tried not to picture the inhuman scene just described, Amelia's last question fully opened the magical world's eyes to the blight of the death eaters.

"Is it possible to be under the imperious curse and forced to take the dark mark?"

The chamber held it's collective breath as Snape answered, "It's not possible, you have to want to take the mark or it won't bind to your soul. The dark lord uses these marks to summon his followers and can administer excruciating pain through them as well. Changing your mind at a later date usually met with a public and painfully prolonged death, there was no retirement plan from being a death eater."

This new information hit like a tsunami, and contained the power to be just as destructive. It destroyed into microscopic pieces the 'I was under the imperious' myth once and for all. People who had used this as a defence for their crimes would soon be finding their non-death eater friends giving them a wide berth. While they may have had their suspicions before, here was public confirmation they had been played for fools. Whether they believed in the pureblood agenda or not, the upper echelons of British wizarding society could not stand back and allow this mockery to continue. Most would not have spoken openly against the dark lord while he lived, that was a one-way ticket to an early grave, but with him vanquished they could fight their own type of battle against his former supporters who were sullyng their better breeding.

Patronage and invitations would immediately dry up, gold tainted with the blood of innocents would never again become acceptable currency to the British wizarding elite. This single change may have done more to drag their community toward respectability than any other.

-oOoOo-

Dumbledore was still missing from the staff table at breakfast the following morning as the owls delivered papers using banner headlines to proclaim Snape's fate.

The fact that the former potions professor had shown genuine remorse had went a long way to deciding his future. There were large wounds in the wizarding psyche that Snape's revelations had pulled the scab off, exposing the rotting flesh underneath that needed to be cauterised.

Neither was it felt the best use of a resource was to lock a potions master in a cell at Azkaban for a decade, rather make use of his talents to help those in need. Snape was sentenced to ten years working in the potions research labs in St Mungo's, spending his nights in a holding cell at the ministry. They had also placed an annual review on his case to determine the impact he was having while researching cures for wizarding ailments.

There was a possibility of early release but, should he breach the terms of this sentence, he had a twenty year stretch in Azkaban hanging over his head. The Potters were quite pleased with this solution, they didn't necessarily want Snape to die again, just be out of their hair.

Hermione was just voicing her surprise that the ministry had discovered the 'carrot and stick' approach when her hand was a blur as she drew her wand, she'd caught sight of Dumbledore approaching Harry from behind. There was nothing she could do if the more powerful Dumbledore chose to act, it didn't mean she couldn't let him see she was ready for it though.

He stood directly behind where Harry was sitting and theatrically cleared his throat, "Mr Potter, I detect your hand in Severus's sentence and I would like to publicly say thank you."

Hermione had her wand held at her side though her words were as cutting as any curse, "We had nothing to do with it, instead my husband showed faith that those in power knew how to do their jobs and left them to get on with it. You should try that approach sometimes headmaster."

Albus ignored the young girl with the rose pinned to her robe, he'd heard the story of how a white owl had delivered them to her yesterday at breakfast. Instead he spoke directly to Harry, "You have displayed great maturity in dealing with these difficult situations and I must commend you for it."

The maturity comment had both Potters waiting on the hammer falling as they wondered if the old wizard had discovered their secret.

Albus regarded this as a sign of encouragement so continued to woo his prey, "I also feel that I must apologise for my behaviour the other night, I hope you will accept it."

Harry nodded, more in relief than anything else.

Again Albus thought he was on a roll, "We apparently got off on the wrong foot and never seemed to recover, I'm hoping this will allow us to move beyond that and build at least a working relationship. Your treatment of Severus has shown your true, forgiving nature." Dumbledore realised he was laying it on a bit thick, he was counting on the boy being flattered enough not to outright refuse him in front of the entire great hall. This would give Albus the foothold he needed to start bending the boy to his will.

Harry couldn't believe the arrogance of the old bastard and thought he'd better answer quickly before Hermione blew a gasket. "Mr Snape committed crimes for which he showed genuine remorse and will now receive punishment for. I think his sentence is not only fair but fitting."

This brought a smile to the face of Albus Dumbledore, blindly assuming he'd just been forgiven all transgressions against the boy. The part of the prophecy Snape had heard was accepted by everyone as having been fulfilled that Halloween night, only Albus knew different. With Severus also avoiding Azkaban, yesterday had went about as well as it possibly could for the headmaster. Now the way was clear for Albus to begin to become the boy's mentor and confidant. Harry's next words evaporated Dumbledore's hopes, exposing them for the mirage that they were.

"You on the other hand have committed crime after crime, without displaying one shred of remorse. The laws of the land are not your own personal playthings headmaster, something you can do as you please with, rather a set of rules laid down to govern us all. Surely as Chief Warlock and Supreme Mugwump you are aware of this?"

This was a rhetorical question that Albus had no intention of answering, he was too busy wondering just how much the Potters knew. Harry didn't keep him wondering for long.

"You sentenced me to a decade in hell, an existence so bad that without my Hermione I would probably have walked in front of a bus to put an end it. I now have a loving family and friends, something that you, and you alone denied me of. A simple 'I'm Sorry' isn't going to cut it."

Albus was now regretting his public play as the gasps of horror around him indicated who was being believed here, what more was he expected to do? Why couldn't the lad just do what Albus wanted him to do, after all it was for the best? Dumbledore was finding it extremely difficult to play chess when the pieces suddenly had minds of their own and wouldn't follow his commands.

He hadn't realised that Harry wasn't quite finished yet.

"You also played a major part in my godfather being illegally imprisoned for a decade, by actions and inaction you have cost us a combined total of twenty years. Neither Sirius nor I are vindictive though, we both feel that a twenty year sentence for you would be too harsh. Our lawyers tell us they are confident that by the time they're finished preparing charges, you'll see the inside of a cell for the next ten years. Both Sirius and myself could live with that."

Dumbledore stood rooted to the spot as the Potters and their friends headed off to class, the glances as they walked past left no doubts where their loyalties lay. Unfortunately for Dumbledore, it wasn't just the Gryffindors giving him dirty looks.

Albus had never known children like these two and was at a loss on how to proceed, the mere fact that he, Albus Dumbledore was talking to them should have seen the pair swooning to do his bidding. The lawyers were no idle threat, if they could prove any of their accusations then Albus would be in a world of trouble. As the proof wasn't too hard to find, Albus had to get the Potters to change their minds. That was proving to be easier said than done.

Quirrell had sat avidly watching the latest episode in the saga that surrounded the Potters, his master studying every nuance. There was now a realistic chance that they might permanently remove the old fool from the castle without him having to intercede. The biggest problem with that scenario was that Dumbledore was sure to take the stone with him.

His plans were set for Halloween, regaining a body exactly a decade after losing his own should empower his new one. Aided by one of the most powerful nights on the magical calendar and Tom decided his original plan would stand. Halloween would be when the dark lord came out from behind this turban and Voldemort proudly stood once more.

-oOoOo-

The Potters were about to leave for home after another busy week at Hogwarts but they had a slight problem to deal with first, namely one Percy Weasley. The problem was not ensuring the redhead got what he deserved, rather they couldn't be connected to it and that it didn't screw-up their other plans. With the map and cloak in Hermione's bag, they put their scheme into operation, the rest would depend on Percy.

The silently following former prefect was well aware the Potters were due to leave for home, so when they started heading in the other direction Percy knew they were up to something.

As they headed toward for the forbidden third floor, a scenario began to take shape in Percy's mind. Catch them doing something they shouldn't be and their little jaunt into London this weekend would be cancelled, due to their resulting detention. Penelope wouldn't then be spending the day with Wood and Percy might even get his precious

prefect's badge back. When he heard the girl speak, his mind was instantly set. Thoughts of Penelope on his arm and a shiny badge adorning his lapel saw Percy throwing any doubts into a cold, dark, lonely corner.

"Are you sure about this Harry? We could be killed, or even worse expelled!"

Harry was desperately trying not to laugh as his wife was making faces at him while she spoke those words from another life, "Hermione love, when have I ever led you wrong?"

The young girl's 'harrumph' could clearly be heard around the corner by the stalking redhead. Wand in hand Percy sprang into action, only to find himself faced with an empty dead-end. The only escape was the slightly open door, thinking that the time for caution was long gone Percy burst into the room with a curse already on his lips.

It was to Percy's great misfortune that was where the curse stayed, due to being hit with a wandless silencing charm as he passed an invisible Harry Potter in the corridor.

Percy's entire universe had shrunk to three sets of staring eyes and the fang-filled slobbering jaws underneath them. He slowly and very carefully retraced his steps, away from the now growling heads toward the door. Finding it not only closed but locked ended all rational thought, banging the door with fists and feet while silently screaming his lungs out for someone to save him.

His vain attempts at escape and calling for help came to a painful and abrupt end. One set of jaws clamped on his shoulder while another grabbed Percy by the leg, he was up in the air still trying to scream when the tug of war was violently ended. The third set of jaws crushed his stretched torso as all three heads now fought against each other over this tasty morsel. Percy was ripped to pieces, though mercifully was dead before this happened.

The Potters entered with Hermione's little jewellery box playing 'Greensleeves' for some unknown reason. Harry was gazing in astonishment at all the mess when his wife promptly added to it.

The sight of all the blood combined with the horrendous smell saw Hermione barf everything she'd eaten since the day she was born all over the room. Harry was by her side in an instant, supporting her as the dizziness threatened to overtake Hermione. Harry led her back outside the room before she even realised, only when her lungs drew in air that wasn't tainted by the smell of blood and ripped intestines did Hermione's eyes come back into focus. She decided there and then that she'd rather face her death by dementor, anything was better than that!

"Oh I'm sorry Harry, I just couldn't ..."

Harry gently placed his finger on his wife's lips to prevent her saying anymore, "Hermione, put the cloak back on and check the map. I have to go back in there and need you to stand guard."

Normally this would have drawn a different response from Hermione, this time she could only look toward her husband with gratitude. She didn't think she could go back in that room today.

Harry worked quickly, using his wandless magic he soon had the entire room clean. Any leftover Percy was transfigured into fertiliser and made its way down the hatch to a welcoming devil's snare. In less than ten minutes there was no sign Percy had ever entered the room, this was necessary to preserve their other plans.

If it were discovered that a student had met their death in here, Dumbledore would be arrested, the stone would be removed and Riddle fade back into obscurity. This was not what they wanted so Percy had to disappear. With the castle-wide excitement over the trip tomorrow he probably wouldn't even be noticed as missing tonight, when he couldn't be found and with no traces of foul play Percy would hopefully be classed as a runaway.

Harry left the room to find an anxious Hermione waiting on him, they stayed under the cloak until escaping from the castle therefore not having to explain to anyone why Hermione was chalk white. They were through the gates and on the path to Hogsmead before Hermione gave a voice to what was on her mind.

"I'm sorry Harry, I thought I was stronger than that. I'm even beginning to doubt if we're doing the right thing."

Harry was not about to let Hermione think she had failed him, it just wasn't possible for his wife to do that.

"Hermione there is no shame in being upset at a sight like that, you're still the strongest person I've ever known. Remember this wasn't just the man who passed sentence on us, he was also waiting in ambush the other night. If there has to be blood splattered all over the walls then I would just as soon make sure it's not ours or anyone we care about."

Harry now had his arm around his wife, "You know I would do anything for you but please don't ask me to spare Ronald Bloody Weasley. I don't know how I would react to that or even if I could let him live."

Hermione leaned into him as the couple made their way toward the village, "I think it was just the shock Harry, we've both seen more than our share of death but that was something else. We engineered the whole event and Percy never stood a chance."

Harry squeezed her shoulder that his arm was already around, "That's the way it's supposed to be Hermione, only a fool gives the bad guys a chance. We take them out coldly and cleanly, well alright, I suppose that wasn't very clean!"

"Harry how can you try and joke about this? I'm worried we may be going dark and you're trying to insert humour into a situation that doesn't have any."

Harry stopped and turned his wife around to face him, "Do you think Voldemort or his death eaters lose their breakfast every time they kill someone? I will never go dark as long as I have you, your love wouldn't allow it. By the same token I will not be able to rest until those who did you harm have been made to pay. That Ronald still draws breath is only sufferable because I know it won't be for much longer."

It was a thoughtful Hermione who answered as they continued their journey, "I'm glad we decided not to deal with Ginny, I don't think I could have done that. It's going to be hard enough spending the weekend with her while knowing we arranged Percy's demise."

Harry had to agree with her on that point, "I know the timing couldn't have been worse but it was Percy who forced the issue, Ron was supposed to have been first until he tried to ambush us the other night. We've discussed this on many occasions love, though I will admit seeing the result is an entirely different matter."

Intellectually Hermione was aware Harry made sense, these people had hurt them before and seemed only too willing to do so again at the first opportunity. It was the sights, sounds and especially the aromas that made it oh so real, no longer a mental exercise in meticulous planning.

Ron was scheduled to meet a similar fate, with Ginny becoming their friend the dynamics of their revenge was changed. His death would have to look like an unfortunate accident, preferably an accident they appeared to have nothing to do with. Even the magical world weren't stupid enough to believe two Weasley children running away. Hermione wondered if Ginny would be so quick to offer hero worship if she knew the truth.

"I know your right love but that won't help me when I have to face Ginny shortly, they'll both be waiting for us in the Leaky Cauldron with mum."

Harry was desperate to cheer her up so changed his intentions there and then, hopefully giving Hermione some time to herself and a soak in the tub at home would see her feeling better before tonight. All he needed now was for mum to be quick on the uptake, Harry wasn't expecting any trouble with that since neither of the Granger women could ever be accused of being slow.

Flooding to London found them once again with Emma Granger's arms around them, Harry certainly thought he could get used to this.

After also greeting both their excited friends Harry sprung his surprise, "Mum could you take Ginny and Luna shopping and we'll meet you back at the house? I have a little something for Hermione's birthday that she'll be able to show you once we get there."

Emma had instantly noticed her daughter's demeanour when she exited the floo, if she didn't know better she would have suspected they'd had a massive fight. The way Hermione was clinging onto Harry dispelled those thoughts before they could take root.

"Harry, you got me Crookshanks, sent me roses and have organised this whole weekend, I feel as if you're spoiling me."

Harry gave her a quick peck on the cheek, "You deserve it! What I'm after will mean a quick trip Gringotts and we'll make our own way home from there."

Emma could read the pleading in Harry's eyes so played along, she would hear the explanation later.

"Ok girls, have either of you been to Harrods before?" Two blank looks drew a smile from Emma. "Oh good! I guarantee you will enjoy this."

They had spoken about getting the girls some muggle clothing for the weekend, and especially for the trip on Saturday. Originally Harry and Hermione were going to accompany them, Emma understood it must be serious for them to pull out.

Emma led both girls to the car as Harry and Hermione left for the Alley.

Ginny was a little disappointed that Hermione headed off with Harry, that disappointment ended the instant she laid eyes on the biggest bloody store she'd ever seen.

The entrance alone was enough to take her breath away, by the time she found herself and Luna being shepherded into the changing rooms with a selection of new clothes Ginny was actually shaking.

Little Ginny Weasley had never had anything that wasn't at least second hand, pre-owned as the shops were now calling it but it didn't lessen the stigma of being poor. Ron hated it when he received something that had been passed down from his brothers but Ginny would have preferred that, at least he knew where it came from. It wasn't that Ginny was a materialistic little girl, more the result of a particular nightmare that had haunted her since she was about seven.

Ginny was walking down a busy Diagon Alley when a young girl's voice rings out loud and clear, 'Oh look mummy, that little redheaded girl is wearing my old dress'. This led to a flood of little girls taking back all the clothes Ginny was wearing, leaving her standing in the middle of the Alley in only her knickers.

It was totally illogical, absolutely mortifying and woke her up sweating and in tears every time.

Here was this practical stranger, buying her new clothes and taking them into their home for a weekend. Ginny began to understand why Hermione was the extraordinary young witch she was, with Emma Granger as her mother she couldn't really be anything else!

Both girls were being given the opportunity to see firsthand how this family operated, Ginny was probably looking forward to that as much as any of the adventures they had planned for the weekend.

Luna's reactions were slightly more complicated, she really liked Emma and loved to shop. While her father hadn't a clue how to shop for a little girl, being here with Emma was reviving some bittersweet memories of afternoons spent with her mother. It was never about what dress or blouse they eventually returned home with, more about enjoying each other's company and spending girl-time together.

Those were some of the best memories Luna had of her mother and she didn't need to stretch her imagination any to see her mum and Emma being very good friends.

It would appear to Luna that friendship with Harry and Hermione came with an admission to their family included, this was a whole new experience to Luna and one that she certainly welcomed.

Emma was also enjoying herself, the expressions of wonder and awe as both girls stared in astonishment at the most common of things had her chuckling in amusement. When they headed off to the changing rooms with a couple of pairs of coloured jeans and a few tops each Ginny had appeared ready to pass out. As fun as this was Emma just wanted to have a talk with Hermione, something had clearly happened and Emma was desperate to know what.

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Harry had placed a specific order with a jeweller the day he bought Crookshanks, it was now time to revisit the shop. He was going to wait until Monday morning but Hermione needed cheering up now.

Hermione soon found herself being presented with a black velvet box, on opening the lid she discovered a bespoke piece of jewellery that sent her pulse racing. It was a gold heart shaped locket that had two sets of the intertwined initials HJP carved into it. The initials surrounded a diamond that sparkled in the centre of the piece, it was exquisite and Hermione fell in love with her gift immediately.

"I know there is probably loads of jewellery in our vault that now belongs to you, I wanted this piece to be something special. I wanted to give you something no one else has, my heart is your heart in this world and the next."

This earned Harry a kiss before Hermione gushed, Oh Harry, it's so beautiful and I love it. Could you put it on for me please?"

Harry knew he should have spoken to Hermione about this next bit but didn't think he was going to be in too much trouble, "In a moment love, we need to go to Gringotts first. The Goblins have been carrying out a special job for me and this is part of it."

Half an hour later Harry and Hermione portkeyed into their bedroom in Crawley, his wife had a thoughtful expression on her face that usually meant there was something she didn't quite understand.

"Would you care to explain to me just how the Goblins were able to turn my necklace into a reusable portkey that takes us directly into our bedroom?"

Harry decided it would be better if he only had to do this once, "Let's go downstairs and I'll explain it to dad at the same time."

Why they were home before mum and by extension what happened to Percy were the stories that had to be told to Dan and Sirius first, then it was time for Harry to come clean.

"In the muggle world Mum and Dad are going to become my legal guardians, in the magical world as usual it's very different. Both come under the protection of house Potter, namely Hermione and me."

Hermione was becoming impatient, not a good sign. "I know this Harry, it still doesn't explain the portkey into our room. To accomplish that degree of accuracy the Goblins would need to have an intimate knowledge, not only of the location but the building as well."

As usual his wife was correct, she was just missing the obvious. "The Goblins do know the exact location of this house, right down to every piece of furniture in it. At my request they warded the entire house."

Dan didn't know what Harry was talking about, leaving him unsure whether to be happy or angry. He glanced at Hermione for a further explanation.

She was staring at Harry with an expression torn between wonder and love, "Thanks Harry! Dad it basically means the house is protected against intruders, fire, that kind of thing. Knowing my husband like I do, I would be willing to wager this is the best protected house in England, if not the entire UK. He would have paid for the best where you and mum are concerned; I now have a beautiful necklace that will take us directly from our bedroom to just

outside the Hogwarts wards. That should save someone having to continually drive us to and from London."

Dan was in agreement with his son-in-law, when it came to the safety of his girls then money was no object. He still dreaded to think how much Harry had spent protecting a house they would be moving out of soon.

"Harry, while we're on the subject of guardians, our lawyers inform us that the unopposed custody hearing will be Tuesday morning. They don't foresee any problems but would like you both to be there in a 'just in case' basis. It should be a mere formality but why take a chance when we don't have to."

The smile that crept over Hermione's face was terrifying, "Good, then I can start on those bastards. It's time for some payback on the Dursleys for all the abuse they heaped on my husband."

One glance told Harry it was a lost cause though he felt obliged to make the attempt. "Sweetheart, is that really necessary? I'm quite happy knowing I never need to see them again."

If Hermione had used this expression earlier they wouldn't have needed a music box, Fluffy would have taken one glance and then been found cowering in a corner. "Did you honestly think I was going to let people who were deliberately cruel to my husband just walk away without being made to pay? You obviously don't know me as well as you think you do. I have a few things in mind and have yet to decide which, or even how many of them I will use on the Dursleys."

The tone of Hermione's voice caused an involuntary shudder to run down the three male's spines, "Now I'm going to have a relaxing herbal bath, I would prefer to smell of rosemary than Percy's remains."

They all watched as Hermione climbed the stairs before Sirius felt obliged to say something, "After hearing how you pair dealt with Percy Weasley I had already made my mind up never to mess with you two but Merlin Harry, your wife is one scary girl! I think I might actually feel sorry for the Dursleys."

Dan wore an expression that matched his daughter's from a moment ago, "Don't waste your sympathy Sirius, I saw the cupboard they forced Harry to live in. Hermione has my complete approval and support for anything she does to those animals. The only reason we didn't involve the police was to get Harry out of there as quickly and cleanly as possible. After Tuesday when Harry legally joins our family the gloves can come off as far as the Dursleys are concerned."

Sirius was looking at his godson strangely, wondering how Harry turned out the way he did after being 'raised' like that.

Harry decided to follow his wife up the stairs, "I just hope Hermione remembers we planned to use the Dursleys against Dumbledore, I would rather see him get what's coming to him than the Dursleys."

Sirius waited until his godson had left before asking Dan the obvious question, "Do you think he stands any chance of changing her mind?"

Dan snorted, "Not a snowball's chance in hell!"

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Luna couldn't help but smile at how happy her best friend appeared, Ginny was sitting on the other side of Hermione and wearing the new 'party dress' that Emma had bought earlier, she looked ecstatic! Luna was also wearing a new party dress and sitting beside Harry at a table that was positively groaning with wonderful food.

Hermione apparently had no close relatives and no other friends she wished to invite, this left the four youngsters and three adults at a table in the birthday girl's favourite Italian restaurant. Luna had at first thought the food looked too good to eat, her first mouthful told her how ridiculous that idea was, she quickly decided Italian cuisine was her new favourite thing.

Luna noticed Harry watching her, he smiled before leaning over and whispering in her ear. "This is why you're such a good friend Luna, apart from not having a jealous or deceitful bone in your body, your friend's happiness means more to you than your own. Never doubt

that Hermione and me will always want your friendship and will try to be the best friends we can in return."

Luna's smile probably outshone Ginny's as she answered her new friend, "Thanks Harry, you have no idea what that means to me."

Harry put his hand on her arm, "Trust me Luna, we both do! It's been very difficult for Hermione and me to make friends though I know we've made some really good one's now."

The sparkle in Luna's eyes had nothing to do with light reflected off the candles on the beautiful birthday cake that the waiters delivered to their table, sitting in a restaurant with friends managed that effect all by itself. Sitting here singing happy birthday to a new friend made Luna Lovegood a very happy young witch.

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Oliver Wood was also very happy, he was spending tomorrow outside the castle in the company of a lovely young woman. McGonagall's assurance that the boy who organised the event was not only superb seeker material, but was prepared to play for Gryffindor, set Oliver's heart racing almost as much as thoughts of Penny.

The only cloud on Oliver's horizon was the empty bed in their dorm, Percy Weasley was rapidly becoming a right bloody jealous prat.

Oliver had never expected the prefect's badge, being more than happy to be Quidditch captain. His first night of rounds with Miss Clearwater had gone some way to have him reevaluating that opinion. Percy's jealousy couldn't have been more pronounced if he'd taken a full page ad in the Prophet to announce it, Oliver was of the opinion that was Percy's tough shit. Sometimes during a Quidditch match the game could throw your team an advantage, his job as captain was to ensure his team grasped any advantage they could.

The unattached Miss Clearwater had practically landed in Oliver's lap, he now intended to use every advantage he could to woo this lovely witch. If Percy was trying to screw-up their day out tomorrow then he

was going to be disappointed, Oliver had no intention of playing his games and just went to bed early.

The young wizard was hoping he dreamed about Penny again, Oliver Wood was discovering there were other things to do at Hogwarts that didn't require the use of a broom. He was looking forward to exploring the various cupboards where they were stored though!

Thanks for reading

Chapter 12

Draco could only look on in despair as Slytherins sat at breakfast while dressed as muggles. Chatting away incessantly about the things they were going to see and do today. Adding acutely to the blond Slytherin's displeasure was the letter he received from his father. Draco had been ordered to stay out of trouble and go nowhere near the Potters, it was beginning to appear as if the Malfoy name no longer carried the authority it used to.

Unbelievably it was Ron Weasley who sympathised with him, "Know exactly how you feel mate, it turns my stomach to think the twins and Ginny are cozying up to those arses after what they did to our family. Dad also warned us not to cause any problems but if you're hatching any plans then I want in!"

Draco would have dearly loved to take Ron up on his offer but daren't, he didn't know how things worked in the Weasley family, with the Malfoy's his father's word was law. Getting back at the Potters was very desirable though his father's punishment for disobeying him certainly wouldn't be. Draco would just have to be a Slytherin and bide his time.

"Potter's not worth my time, it's just knowing this lot are going to be even more hyper tomorrow. I think I'll be taking a lay in and giving breakfast a miss."

Ron watched the rest of the first years leaving the hall as he pondered Draco's words. Not getting back at Potter was bad enough, missing a meal because of it was just plain mental. Ron decided to seek out Percy to ask his advice, after another helping of course.

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Excitement was also running high in the Granger household, neither Harry, Sirius, Luna or Ginny had ever been to an amusement park before. All were getting ready to head off toward London, joining the coach there with the rest of the group.

Tonks was apparating straight to Hogsmead, allowing her to assist with the transfer to the Leaky Cauldron. They were as prepared as they could be.

Piling into the Granger's people carrier had Dan, ably abetted by Sirius, taking up the mantle of a big kid. He had the sing-song started before they left the drive. The party was in extremely good spirits as Emma drove toward London.

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The five Slytherins found themselves being accepted by the rest of the group, this was an unusual but welcome experience.

Neville Longbottom summed up everyone's feelings very eloquently, "We're all just looking to enjoy ourselves today."

The Hogwarts contingent had just began appearing in the Leaky Cauldron when the Potters arrived with Luna and Ginny. Hermione was in her element issuing instructions. "My mum, dad and Sirius are waiting for everyone on the coach, it's parked about ten yards down the street. If you can start making your way there, we can soon be off."

Fred and George exited the floo to squeals of joy from Ginny, she'd known Ron wasn't going to be there and hadn't even considered that the twins might be. Ginny was attempting to describe the last twenty four hours in twenty seconds as the redheads laughingly made their way to the coach. Padfoot and Moony would be there!

Hannah Abbot sat beside her best friend Susan Bones and was in total awe at the luxury muggle coach. They were sitting in very comfortable seats, had adjustable air and electric lights above their heads while music played throughout the entire bus. She looked at a few faces and guessed the other purebloods were feeling the same as her, what did the rest of the day hold when the coach impressed the hell out of them.

Emma was sitting beside Professor Burbage, trying to convince the woman of the best way to organise the day. "The whole point of this

outing is to let the kids experience this for themselves, that won't happen if we lead them around by the hand all day. I understand that you're the one with the responsibility here but these parks are very safe places. Once we're inside let them wander around with their friends, set up a meeting point and we'll have a presence there on the hour throughout the day. We'll meet them all for lunch and then collect everyone when it's time to head for home. None of them are carrying their wands and, as long as they don't leave the park will be perfectly safe."

Charity was unsure, she had imagined leading all the kids around in a group, stopping at attractions to see who wanted to go on. Letting them loose to make their own decisions was a radical concept, radical concepts were not something she was used to.

Emma pushed some more, "There will be thousands of people here, from all corners of the world, they won't stand out that much. They will make their way around the park in groups of friends, making their own choices and discovering things for themselves. This trip is supposed to be fun but we all want it to be educational as well. The park has hundreds of staff, all trained to offer assistance to anyone who needs it, they will call for us on the public address system if there's an emergency."

The thought of turning these kids loose was both terrifying and exhilarating to Charity. As a teacher it is her job to impart knowledge into growing minds, the problem with her subject is that without experience it's meaningless. She could describe muggle transport until she was blue in the face and not get the reaction that this morning's coach journey had provided.

As a muggle studies professor, she had often thought the few purebloods that took her class didn't believe a word she said. With her mind made up, Charity was wondering on the best way to inform the students when Emma handed her a microphone while the driver turned down the music.

"What do I ... Oh My! Can the whole coach hear me?"

The question was directed at Emma though when the entire coach shouted 'YES' Charity had her answer.

"Ok, does everyone have their maps?" Another quick chorus of 'yes' had Charity convinced she was doing the right thing, even by talking to them using a microphone instead of a sonorus charm, the children were learning without realising it. That was the professor's entire reason for giving her enthusiastic support to the event, time to let them know what was in store for them.

"After we get inside the park you will be allowed to explore as you want with your friends." Loud cheering forced her to stop for a moment, clearly that was a popular decision. "We will determine a meeting point and show everyone where lunch will be served before you disperse. Most important rule, do not leave the park until it's time for us to return home."

This was greeted by blank stares of incredulity, why the hell would they want to leave this park of wonders? If all Hogwarts rules were like that one, they would never be in trouble because no one would ever break them.

Some more instructions, followed by a totally needless 'enjoy yourselves' had everyone cheering again.

Harry approached Dean and gave him a plain wallet containing cash in Sterling. "I know both you and Seamus are used to handling cash but the girls aren't, this is in case you want a hot dog, drink or even a souvenir of the day. The rides are free and lunch is provided."

Harry left some dumbstruck Gryffindors to repeat the scene with Justin from Hufflepuff and the Ravenclaws Terry and Mandy. He then approached Tracy, "I can give you guys a wallet or you can hang out with us? I know how scary it can be getting thrown head first into a different culture, without Neville's help Hermione and me would be lost."

After excitement, the next strongest emotion amongst the five Slytherins was fear, fear of the unknown. Harry had just offered them the chance to put an end to that so they quickly accepted his offer.

Fred and George were chatting animatedly with Sirius and Remus, the snorts of laughter would have some Hogwarts professors worried. After handing a wallet to the twins and Oliver, Harry sat down beside an excited Hermione. She was patiently attempting to describe why the log flume was her favourite ride to Neville. Their friend couldn't quite decide whether Hermione was teasing him or actually serious. The idea that you sat in a hollowed-out log, which then shot down a slide into cold water sounded scary enough. That you were then soaking wet and this was supposed to be fun left Neville almost convinced she was joking, almost!

It was with wide eyes they entered the park, the entrance really was beautiful and surrounded by enticing shops. After ensuring they knew what the schedule was and the location of the restaurant for lunch the kids were released, they disappeared so fast they could have apparated!

The six adults were all standing there and it was left to Sirius to ask the obvious, "Eh guys, what do we do now?"

Emma grabbed him by the arm and started leading him away toward the nearest ride, "We have some fun!" As the rest were having a good giggle at his expense, Emma used the opportunity to have a quiet word to Sirius, "Every ride we go on today, you sit beside Charity." The blank expression left Emma needing to explain further, "If you're sitting with Charity, Dan's sitting beside me, who does that leave?"

Sirius now wore a wry grin, "Emma, if I didn't require Moony's permission as well, you would be indoctrinated into the marauders today. That's brilliant, sneaky as hell but still brilliant!"

Neville was very nervous as the contraption closed down over his shoulders. The seats were aligned in pairs with Ginny and Luna in the front, Harry and Hermione behind them. Next came Neville who found himself sitting beside Millicent with Tracy and Daphne behind. Theo and Blaise were bringing up the rear. As it clicked shut, it was a now extremely nervous Neville Longbottom who spoke to his friend in front of him, "Hey Harry, is it supposed to make that noise?"

"No idea Neville, never been on one of these before."

"WHAT!" this was all Neville managed to say before a siren sounded and they shot out of there at great speed. Harry, and everyone else, heard Neville screaming the entire way around the ride. What they didn't know was that most of it was down to Millicent grabbing his hand and squeezing it in a death grip, almost breaking the poor boy's fingers.

Luna had been so happy that she and Ginny just met the height requirements, now the terrified girl wasn't so sure. As the ride was coming to an end, the screams became cries of laughter, almost relief that they'd survived. Luna finally got the point of these rides. Although you were perfectly safe being strapped to your seat, it sure didn't feel safe as you were twisted and turned at breakneck speed. Luna was the first pureblood to grasp the concept of a thrill ride, she wouldn't be the last though.

Neville was delighted it was over only to discover there was further torture in store, Harry had just bought pictures of them all on their first roller coaster. Neville was at least pleased to see he wasn't the only one screaming though Millicent hadn't uttered a sound, she'd been too scared to scream. She also hadn't let go of Neville's hand since they got off the ride. Originally it was by way of an apology and to try to get the blood flowing back into his fingers again. Now it just felt nice.

Oliver Wood didn't think this day could get any better, seeing Penny in muggle clothing instead of Hogwarts robes was a real eye opener. He now had a full day of her company without even the professors to keep an eye on them. Fred and George thankfully took the hint early on and left the couple alone. Penny held on to his arm to steady herself after leaving a particularly wild ride and kept hold of it as they walked around the park, could this day get any better?

Oliver was forced to concede the answer to that was yes, going on the river rapids and seeing Penny in a wet T-shirt was a standout memory for him. Getting straight to the point he asked Penny to be his girlfriend before lunchtime, she happily said yes.

Susan, Hannah and Ernie were happy to let Justin guide them around the park, the rides were fabulous but what really impressed Susan was the brilliant organisation behind it all.

The park was massive and there must have been thousands of people all milling about yet everything ran so smoothly. She reckoned this one park must employ as many people as the entire ministry of magic which really imprinted on the young witch. That and the vending machines that gave you ice cold drinks and snacks at the press of a button, she wondered if there was a house elf inside them?

The twins loved the rides but it was the shops that really caught their attention. Their dream was to one day open one of their own and these were like nothing they had seen in the magical world. So bright and colourful, with an incredibly wide range of merchandise, both were drawn in like moths to a flame.

Even the way the stuff was presented to the customers was worthy of note, placing their own logo on goods not only provided free advertising but allowed them to increase the price as well. Charity would be pleased to know the twins were taking such an educational view of the outing.

Charity was currently living off her nerves, she'd placed her faith in the children and could now only hope they appeared for lunch. Her faith was rewarded though as they began to filter into the enclosed part of the restaurant that the Grangers had hired. She couldn't fail to notice the two prefects, especially since Miss Clearwater had a grinning Mr Wood on one arm and a large stuffed toy animal under her other. Apparently the groups of friends had been criss-crossing each other all over the park, swapping stories and rating attractions as they made their way to the next ride on their agenda.

All the tension left the Muggle Studies Professor as the last group entered their area and they all sat down to lunch, watching as the muggle born's explained what pizza and nachos were justified the entire trip as far as she was concerned.

Emma was awash with conflicting emotions as she watched her daughter interact with her friends for the first time. On the one hand she couldn't be happier to see this version of Hermione live such a different life, outwardly at least she appeared a radiantly happy young girl.

Hearing from Dan last night what they'd done to the Weasley lad had her in tears, Not for Percy but the fact her children had to take actions like this. Like almost everyone Emma had never taken someone's life, and the old Emma would have argued it was something she was incapable of. That was before hearing what happened to her daughter at the hands of the youngest Weasley boy.

In their timeline it was less than three weeks since they lay helpless as Hermione was abducted from their living room, Listening on the phone as both Hermione and Harry were basically sentenced to death had changed Emma Granger forever. This Emma Granger was not in a forgiving frame of mind and would kill to protect her loved ones. She just wished there was some way they could take the burden from Harry and Hermione, once again they were relegated to playing the role of support troops.

Both Grangers found themselves concentrating on the lives their children were determined to save, rather than those fated to meet their end by Harry and Hermione's hand. They now knew Sirius, Remus, Charity, Nymphadora and Ted Tonks, even some of the kids here today would hopefully change their ways. She glanced at the twins chatting with Ginny and tried to remember which one of them had originally died, not that it mattered since she couldn't tell them apart anyway.

Her children had now killed two people and planned for another three, four if you counted Voldemort. Strangely Emma found herself accepting that, if the youngest male Weasley had been here today she doubted if she could have prevented Dan murdering him, Emma probably would have helped!

It wasn't too difficult for Sirius to guess where Emma's thoughts were taking her, the three had spent a lot of time talking about the two most important people in the world to them. Sirius had tried to give

the Grangers some insight into the pureblood opinions and their way of thinking. Just because he didn't agree with them didn't mean Sirius couldn't understand them or where they were coming from.

He would have to try to explain to Dan and Emma exactly how big a coup the kids had pulled off here. Sirius was vilified and eventually disowned after being sorted into Gryffindor, rejecting the dark lord's philosophies was the final straw for a family who were actually darker than their name. Here were children of all blood classifications and the four houses of Hogwarts sitting together as friends in a muggle establishment. This was ground breaking, this was momentous, this was so much fun!

Purebloods' wearing T-shirts and baseball caps with a muggle theme park logo on them was a prank worthy of the heir to the marauders. Harry and Hermione had began something here today that could literally change the British magical community, it was only a small first step but didn't all journeys start that way?

Hermione had asked that there not be another birthday cake or large fuss, like Harry she hated being the centre of attention and already had her fill this week. Being here with Harry, her parents and her friends was more than enough for the once lonely girl. They'd saved her favourite ride until after lunch, not wanting to spend the day wearing wet clothes. Her husband could easily perform a wandless drying charm on them though that was something they had no intention of advertising.

Charity was a lot calmer as she watched the children head back into the park, she was actually looking forward to going on some more rides herself. There was still a few hours before the park began to close and she intended to make the most of them.

Tracy Davis had been physically flung about, turned upside down on more than one occasion and nearly been sick three times, she'd just had one of the best days of her life! Heading back onto the bus she began to contemplate the letter she was going to be sending home, her father had asked Tracy to forward her impressions of the day as soon as possible.

She was aware her father was disturbed by the casual way Harry had dismissed the life debt, he actually planned on speaking to him about it when their proposed visit to the ministry was arranged. He was thinking like a pureblood and considering what it would have cost him if someone like Draco Malfoy had saved her instead.

Tracy was certain that Harry not only knew exactly what he'd done but actually thought her calling him Harry was a fair payment, there's was a whole different way of thinking and the Slytherin girl was beginning to understand why.

She had seen and experienced some wondrous things today, yes most of them could be replicated using magic but that wasn't the point. Tracy had been raised to think she was better than these people yet their ingenuity and inventiveness, not to mention their organisational skills were mind blowing. What they achieved without magic was truly awe inspiring, leaving Tracy thinking that perhaps instead of better, different would be a more apt description. With that thought Harry and Hermione's hopes for the day were accomplished, for now.

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As the occupants on the coach were enjoying their fish suppers while en route to the Leaky Cauldron, a very nervous Ron Weasley made his way toward the staff table as dinner ended. It was the head of Gryffindor he approached, "Excuse me Professor McGonagall but do you know where Percy is? I've been looking for him all day, he's missed breakfast, lunch and now dinner."

McGonagall's eyebrows shot up, she couldn't remember seeing Percy today either. Minerva called for Sir Nicolas who rapidly organised a search of the castle. Turning her attention back to Ronald she tried to offer the lad some encouragement, "With the ghosts, house elves and portraits all looking for him, your brother should soon be found."

McGonagall's reassurances proved to be hollow though, as neither hide nor hair had been seen of Percy Weasley since his last class yesterday. All that they could surmise at the moment was that the lad

didn't appear to be in the castle. Whether he'd used today's outing as a cover to sneak out was something they were forced to wait on their returnees for more information.

It was a group of very happy, though extremely tired students who returned to Hogwarts. They were originally disconcerted to find there was a reception committee waiting on them.

Charity and Remus quickly confirmed that, not only was Percy not with them but they hadn't seen him at any point when leaving the castle. The twins also reported that they hadn't seen their brother since yesterday, all thoughts of joking pushed aside as they could see this was serious.

Oliver had to confess that he didn't see Percy in the dorm last night, McGonagall fixed him with a withering stare that demanded an explanation.

"Professor, since being made prefect, Percy has continually refused to recognise my authority. He has worked behind the scenes to usurp me and won't be satisfied until he gets this badge back. When he didn't show before I went to bed last night I assumed this was an attempt to disrupt today's outing. His jealousy over the badge dims in comparison to his rage over my association with Miss Clearwater. Since she has most graciously agreed to be my girlfriend, I fully expected I would need my wand to defend myself when he discovered the news."

McGonagall was unhappy, though forced to concede she'd placed Wood into this situation. If he'd went to bed before curfew then the prefect had done no wrong, he'd ensured the younger students had been accounted for so had done his job. This was the reason they had an earlier curfew.

"The school has been searched from top to bottom with no sign of him being found, I'm going to have to inform the DMLE and his guardian that he's missing." Her intimidating stare aligned onto new targets as she spoke to the Weasley twins, "Is there anything that you can tell me about this? Something that might seem unimportant yet provide the clue that we need."

George gave it a moment's thought before answering, "Percy didn't want to return to Hogwarts, he's actually called us a disgrace to our family for associating with the Potters. When he discovered Ginny was staying with them this weekend I thought he was going to explode."

McGonagall's eyebrows were once more heading into her hairline at the news Ginny Weasley was spending time with the Potters.

Fred agreed with his twin, "He took losing the badge very badly and has been giving Oliver a hard time, we also think he might have secretly fancied Penelope but didn't do anything about it." He seemed to think of something and then dismiss the idea, "It's a pity that mum's clock isn't working properly or it may have been some help."

McGonagall had heard of this timepiece and asked what the problem was.

"Ever since we got back from King's Cross, all the hands were pointing at mortal peril. Dad made her take it down and placed it in storage. It was frightening Ginny and Ron and there was no spare cash to get it repaired."

Something in his brother's words caused a spark of an idea to go off inside Fred's head. "Moony, Harry has something that could really help us out here. Do you think he would let us borrow it?"

Remus could have kicked himself for not thinking of it sooner, he supposed that's what happens when your thoughts turn to a beautiful smile, sexy laugh and spiky pink hair. "They would have to drive back from London so should still be up. I'll leave immediately and try not to alarm Ginny too much."

Albus had been allowing Minerva to deal with the situation until hearing Harry's name mentioned. "And just what may I ask has Mister Potter got to do with this situation?"

Fred and George glanced at one another quickly before answering, "Nothing sir, he has in his possession something he received from his father that will determine if Percy is actually in the castle."

Albus liked the sound of that, the minute Remus returned with the item he would be confiscating it. Something like that shouldn't be in the hands of a student, rather in the more experienced care of a certain headmaster.

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Remus caught them having a cup of tea before bed, after explaining the situation the marauder's map was quickly spread on the kitchen table.

When Harry activated the parchment, Remus demonstrated how to use the map's search function, something Harry hadn't learned about the last time. When the search for Percy produced no results, Sirius suggested trying someone else to confirm the map was still functioning properly. It took less than a minute to pinpoint Argus Filch as he patrolled the corridors, proving the map was working and Percy wasn't in the castle.

"Do you think he's run away?" Ginny quietly asked.

Remus answered the girl as honestly as he could, "Ginny at the moment all we know is Percy's not in the castle, no one has seen or heard anything. The twins said he didn't want to return to Hogwarts and had been acting strangely lately. Percy doing a runner is the only explanation we have for now."

"I knew he didn't want to go back because of that bloody badge, I can't believe he'd do something this stupid."

Luna was hugging her best friend in support, Hermione was very grateful for Harry's arm around her waist. Only his strength and support kept her from breaking down.

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The three Weasley's, Dumbledore and McGonagall were all awaiting his return but it was to the twins he addressed his comments, "Sorry guys, Percy isn't in the castle."

Minerva gave a tired sigh before heading toward the fireplace to Floo call the DMLE. She would then have to deal with Muriel Prewitt, not a task to be undertaken lightly.

The Weasleys left for their respective dorms as Albus made his move, "Remus, if there exists a method for keeping track of people inside Hogwarts then I must have it. I am the headmaster after all."

Remus couldn't believe the cheek of the old man, "I'm afraid you will find that it belongs to Harry, it's one of the few items he possesses that connects him to his father. I wish you luck in the task of trying to force him to surrender it. There is more chance of the goblins giving away free gold than Harry parting with a Potter family heirloom."

Dumbledore was getting pretty fed-up of people saying no to him, this never used to happen. He was about to remind Lupin that he actually was employed by Hogwarts, therefore Albus Dumbledore when Minerva returned from her floo calls.

"We will have aurors at the school before breakfast, Hagrid is sweeping through the forbidden forest as we speak, looking for traces of the boy. I have to inform you Albus that Muriel Prewett will also be here for breakfast, I got the impression that your entrails might be on her menu. She was very upset at getting dragged into the Pettigrew incident and is demanding to speak with you personally when she arrives tomorrow."

Minerva would have smiled at the headmaster's facial expression if the situation hadn't been so serious. There had been instances in the past where children had gone missing for a short time, though they had always turned up within a day or two. Minerva couldn't get rid of the feeling that this time it was going to be different.

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Harry was lying in bed with his wife wrapped in his arms, running his fingers through her hair as he tried to comfort a crying Hermione.

"Oh Harry, I just keep seeing that expression of worry on Ginny's face, I don't know if I can do this again love."

"Hermione, we'll give him the same chance he gave you. He'll be in a bathroom when our rather large and smelly visitor comes 'trick or treating' to Hogwarts, let's see if any of his Slytherin friends come running to his rescue."

Hermione stopped crying for a moment, "You mean it Harry? You would do that for me?"

Harry held her tighter, "Hermione you are the most important person in my life, your happiness is everything to me. Percy never had a chance but I'm prepared to let fate play a part in deciding if Ron should have one."

Harry was a little disturbed at the passionate kiss this earned him, Hermione then spoke softly in his ear, "It's not that I don't want him to pay, I just don't think I would be able to face Ginny afterwards if we did the same to two of her brothers. Perhaps we should concentrate our efforts on getting rid of Riddle first."

Harry kissed her forehead, "Love, I've had some ideas about that. We could contact the goblins about buying the old Riddle place, that would save that caretaker's life as well. Purchase the Gaunt shack that's next to it and the goblins can rip it apart, disposing of the ring without us having to go anywhere near it. I was thinking of building a garden centre on the site, something really muggle to piss Tom off if he ever makes it back,"

The thought of Lord Voldemort travelling to Little Hangleton in search of his horcrux and leaving with a couple of hostages almost brought a smile to Hermione's face.

"If we get the Ravenclaw diadem next week then that would only leave the diary, Dumbledore was almost positive Nagini wasn't made

into a horcrux until Riddle got his new body in the cemetery. Something we have no intention of allowing to happen this time."

Hermione snuggled in deeper, "Smart and considerate, how did I ever get so lucky as to marry you?"

"I'm the lucky one love!" He kissed his wife goodnight and held her until she'd calmed enough to sleep.

Harry understood she was upset and not thinking rationally here, being confronted with the aftermath of Percy and then having to spend the weekend with Ginny immediately after had thrown her for a loop. Hermione was unshakable in her belief that the Dursleys should be made to pay for the treatment of her husband. Yet in the same breath wanted Ronald Weasley to have a chance, Harry had no intention of letting the redhead avoid his date with the troll. This Harry Potter wasn't going to be anybody's golden boy, rather take out the problems before they affected his family. For those that harmed his Hermione there would be no escape and no remorse on his part.

Making sure the target was in the toilet should be fairly easy, the rest was simply ensuring his date didn't stand him up. Dousing Ronald in troll pheromones should ensure the big guy arrived, though with a club in his hand instead of flowers. Harry thought that Ronald being rogered to death by a randy rank troll was a fitting punishment for the animal who dared to touch his Hermione.

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Muriel Prewett travelled down into her cellar and rummaged amongst the assembled junk that Arthur had stored there, looking until she found the famous Weasley clock. It only required a glance to discover it was obviously still not working properly, the hands for Fred and George were correctly pointing at school but Ginny's strangely indicated the child was at home. Charlie, Bill and Arthur were each pointing toward work though the hands representing Molly and Ronald were still stuck at mortal peril. The hand that represented Percy appeared to have been knocked off, probably when they stored it down here.

Molly's precious clock was every bit as worthless as the rest of the Weasley's junk, Muriel would have her talk with Dumbledore before sending an owl to Arthur. She headed off to bed, smiling in anticipation of her upcoming confrontation with Dumbledore and the pleasure obtained from ripping him a new one. It would so start her week off in the right vein.

Thanks for reading.

Chapter 13

Muriel had risen bright and early on Sunday morning, bursting with anticipation of the upcoming confrontation, she hadn't anticipated experiencing a confrontation before she set foot in the castle.

"It makes no difference if you told the headmaster you were coming today or not, until I receive conformation back from him then I can't allow you access to the castle."

Muriel was not about to be thwarted by a mere security guard, "If you were doing your job properly then I wouldn't need to be here, where was this wonderful security when my nephew went missing yesterday?" Her smug expression was soon wiped off her face by a voice coming from behind her.

"That wonderful security was foregoing his day off to accompany a bunch of students on a school trip. I believe two of your nephews and niece were also involved."

Muriel spun round to face this new threat, the fact that it had bright pink hair was enough to set her off. Totally ignoring the auror robes or the five other aurors with her, Muriel cut loose. "I can assure you none of my relations were on any school trip, they would have needed my permission which would most certainly not have been forthcoming. My niece doesn't even attend this school, it would appear they are letting absolutely anyone wear auror robes these days."

Remus found himself liking this harpy even less after the way she spoke to Tonks, he understood immediately that the twins must have forged this woman's signature and couldn't blame them in the slightest. To divert her attention away from that fact he concentrated on Ginny's presence at the theme park.

"Ginny was present as a guest of Lord and Lady Potter, she and her friend Luna have been spending the weekend with them. Miss Tonks was there as a ministry auror to assist with security, I can assure you we both take our jobs and responsibilities very seriously. Your Nephew did not leave the castle while I was in charge of security. The

headmaster's answer should arrive any minute, until then you are not allowed access."

Just to upset Muriel more, the six aurors passed straight through. Tonks rubbed some salt in the festering wound by shouting back, "Remember I'll see you Wednesday for the lessons Remus, I'll clear it with McGonagall so I'm allowed entry."

She walked away laughing with the other aurors, leaving behind a furious Muriel and a werewolf who just had his day considerably brightened.

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Draco Malfoy could be considered part seer as he'd made a far more accurate prediction than the resident professor of divination ever did, breakfast that morning was full of still hyper students telling anyone who would listen just how great their Saturday had been. Logo covered baseball hats, T-shirts, furry stuffed toys and a multitude of muggle photographs, automatically taken of the students on various rides, added an unusual yet welcome touch of spice to breakfast in the castle.

McGonagall was delighted the day had been such a success. At the staff table Charity was also laughingly showing her photograph of being strapped in next to Sirius Black and apparently screaming her head off. Knowing that rogue Sirius as she did, Minerva thought that was a perfectly understandable reaction.

She was glad these students didn't have any lessons today, they would hopefully have calmed before classes tomorrow.

McGonagall thought their reaction, or lack of one, to Percy Weasley's disappearance was also perfectly understandable. The boy hadn't been well liked without any close friends, the fact that it took his brother the entire day to notice he was missing told its own story. That family's run of bad luck was becoming ridiculous, it almost seemed as if someone had it in for the Weasleys. Minerva would have been deeply troubled to discover just how true that thought was.

Minerva also hoped the planned ministry trip would amount to more than a walk around the building before listening to Fudge talk, after yesterday's outstanding success the ministry now had the students' high expectations to live up to. They'd all seen what the muggle world had to offer and been very impressed, the ministry better get its act together because the children would inevitably judge one against the other. It wouldn't do for the magical world to be found wanting.

Several parents were sitting down to breakfast while reading the latest letters from their children, glowing with praise of the muggle world and sharing the same thoughts as Minerva.

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Amelia didn't need to read between the lines to discover Susan not only had a wonderful day but was very impressed with what she experienced. The head of the DMLE decided there and then that her department would run some combat simulations or practice duels that the kids could observe. She would also speak to some other departmental heads about putting on something a bit more exciting for the students.

Yes let the kids see the nuts and bolts of how the ministry worked but they had to remember they were dealing with kids. With a wry grin Amelia remembered asking Susan what part she liked best from her first ever visit of the ministry. Without any hesitation, the then eight year old replied, "The cafeteria, that cake we had was just brilliant!"

Amelia had made the classic mistake of forgetting her niece was a kid. To an eight year old, cake was way more important than a stuffy Wizengamot chambers or aurors in uniform.

Brian Davis was also beginning to think he'd made a classic mistake in judging Lord Potter by traditional pureblood behaviour. Reading Tracy's letter again it would appear he really did want nothing more than his daughter's friendship as payment for a life debt. He would reserve final judgement until he'd met Lord Potter for himself, he was honour bound to encourage Tracy to be friends with them now but it really was a duty he would happily perform.

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Dumbledore's short letter from Remus made for much less pleasant reading, he was sorely tempted to deny the woman access to the castle. Albus racked his brains but couldn't come up with a decent enough reason for sending her home, with his position already precarious he didn't think he could get away with dismissing her out of hand. He sent a note back granting access to the dragon lady. Deciding this was one meeting he was going to have in his office, he asked Minerva to escort Muriel there.

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Minerva was waiting at the front door for them, she invited Remus along in his role as security advisor. Knowing the temper Muriel had, he might be needed.

She barged into Dumbledore's office in no mood for any preliminaries or verbal sparring, she wanted to get straight to the meat of the matter. "So old man, employing one death eater while harbouring another not enough of a balls-up for you? You have to start losing students in your care now. Perhaps you'd care to explain how my nephew was misplaced, and why no one noticed until it was brought to your attention by his youngest brother?"

Albus was well aware the Weasley children were her grandnephews and nieces who she constantly and continually berated at every given opportunity. This manufactured display of affection from the hateful woman was fooling none of those present.

Dumbledore was beginning to get seriously miffed at everything in the world being his fault, it was time to show this bitch who she was dealing with. "Miss Prewitt, it would appear your grandnephew has run away and is currently listed as missing, though for the life of me I can't think why he'd do something like that." The sarcasm and piercing look the last line was delivered with almost had Minerva and Remus sniggering, the Miss barb hurting almost as much as the missing.

"The castle and grounds have been thoroughly searched by Hogwarts staff and this morning a group of aurors are continuing the search. I'm afraid that at the moment all any of us can do is wait and see what their investigation uncovers."

Muriel was about to explode, wait and see was not good enough in her book, she wanted so action. The fireworks were delayed though by the arrival of Tonks.

"Headmaster, we found the boy's journal hidden in his trunk and think this will answer a few of the questions concerning his disappearance. Let me read some of it out to you."

Got my prefect's badge today, phase one of my master plan completed. Now all I need is for some of those prefect rounds to be in the company of Penelope, she really should get to know me before I ask her to Hogsmead.

Have never been so humiliated in my life, McGonagall ruined my future in front of the entire school. I couldn't even bring myself to look in the direction of the Ravenclaw table. I could never hold my head up in Hogwarts again and definitely don't want to return there.

Wood just left to go on patrol with Penelope, can't write any more at the moment. Too angry to think straight!

All eyes were now glued to Tonks as this tale unfolded.

The Potters just invited Wood and Penelope to London on Saturday, I cannot allow that to happen. My whole life is crashing down around my ears, I need to do something- but what?

Almost did something really rash, don't want them to get away with this but require a well thought out plan. Need it fast though.

Trip is tomorrow and I need to do something, getting desperate.

They all thought this was Percy's gradual build-up to running away, Muriel now had another target to vent her vitriol on. "Who is this vixen

Penelope that ensnared my nephew to the extent he would run away from his family?"

Minerva came right back at her, "The girl in question doesn't even know your nephew exists and has done nothing to encourage this fantasy he seems to have built for himself. His own brothers confirmed he hadn't even spoken to the girl. This is no star-crossed lover's scenario, instead a rather unhealthy obsession on Percy's part that quite frankly gives me the creeps."

Tonks butted in, not wanting to become embroiled in any pissing contest between these two formidable women. She wouldn't have minded a side bet on Minerva though. "With no sign of abduction or foul play, we are now treating this as a simple runaway case. We shall continue searching the castle and grounds today but don't expect to find anything else."

With that she left, Remus grabbed the opportunity to accompany her out the door, and anywhere else she wanted to go.

Albus was actually relieved, this was the first time in weeks something had went the way he wanted it to, he decided to end this as quickly as possible. Listening to Muriel Prewitt was not his ideal way of how to spend a pleasant Sunday morning. "As you heard, the case now passes to the ministry. Can I ask if you will be contacting the boy's parents or will that be left for us to do?"

Muriel was raging, this was not how she expected this to play out. She wanted blood on the carpet, preferably not her own. "I am perfectly capable of informing them myself."

Albus just nodded and sat there quietly, that she'd been so shoddily and easily dismissed certainly didn't improve her mood as she stormed from the castle in a rage. She would soon let Molly know what that idiot son of hers had cost Muriel Prewitt, lovesick young fool who was letting his hormones do his thinking. He better hope the aurors found him first because she would bloody castrate him!

-oOoOo-

Hermione realised showing their friends around her home patch was a bad idea the moment she recognised some of the group walking toward them. Melissa, Shauna and Abigail were her chief tormentors all the way through primary school, and of course they had a couple of clueless boys following them around in the hope one of the girls might actually speak to them.

Hermione was having difficulty adjusting to the fact that it was only three weeks ago she left here to find a new life, it looked as if her old one was coming back to bite her on the arse. She wasn't in any way worried about her tormentors possessing the ability to hurt her, it was more Harry's reaction to them she was concerned about. He certainly wouldn't take too kindly if they started hurling abuse at his wife!

Luna and Ginny's reactions were also unknowns, the couple's story of having been friends since primary school wouldn't stand up to too much examination. This lot saying they'd never seen him before certainly wouldn't help, Luna and Ginny's first weekend in the muggle world was just about to become even more educational.

"Oh look, Granger's parents must have bought her some people to hang out with!"

"Well we all know they couldn't be her real friends."

"Yes, who'd want to be friends with that?"

The round of hollow laughter that followed the synchronised verbal assault was as phony as their hair colour. Their routine though was slick and well honed through many years of diligent practice, they just didn't know this was a totally different Hermione Granger they were dealing with.

Calmly Hermione answered her long time tormentors, "Oh, you would be surprised Melissa. Without bitches like you, Shauna and Abigail around, my life is actually quite pleasant now."

This was too much for Steve, no one spoke back to Melissa. Here was his chance to show the girl of his more pleasant dreams just

what he was made of, he pushed his way forward to confront Hermione before a cold voice caused him to hesitate.

"I seriously wouldn't do that if I were you!"

Steve took one glance at the stature of the boy he was faced with and instantly dismissed Harry as any threat, "Why? What are you going to do about it?" He challenged.

"Oh nothing, I was just giving you a friendly word of warning. My Hermione is more than capable of taking care of herself."

The 'my Hermione' bit threw them for a second, and in that second the girl in question decided to act. Steve was standing with both feet planted and fists clenched, ready to hit Hermione for sullyng the name of the beautiful and fair Melissa. Unfortunately for Steve, Hermione had no intention of fighting fair.

In a take-down almost identical to the technique first used by Mrs Potter on Ron Weasley, Steve found himself kissing the ground while his tackle sent messages of unbelievable pain to his brain and his nose coloured the pavement red.

Harry theatrically shook his head, "Some people just never listen to good advice. Because someone makes the choice not to fight back doesn't mean they can't. As a lady, Hermione also reserves the right to change her mind at any point that suits her." They were clearly listening to him though their eyes never left their fallen friend. "Oh and in case that demonstration wasn't enough and you need it explained further, any attacks on my Hermione will be met in the same manor. Swiftly and painfully, for you that is!"

Harry now stood shoulder to shoulder with his wife and both looked ready for trouble. "Would anyone else like to say or do anything to my girlfriend? No? Well if we're done here then kindly take him with you and consider yourselves lucky. I wouldn't have been nearly as forgiving as Hermione."

They walked away from the stunned group, their original intention was to have a nice walk and then stop off for a burger. Hermione

wasn't feeling hungry anymore, whether from the confrontation or the look of absolute hero worship in Ginny's eyes was debatable.

Luna spoke to Harry, "I'm beginning to understand your comment in the restaurant, it would seem neither of you has an easy childhood."

Harry had his arm around Hermione's waist and realised he needed to answer this, Luna was a very smart girl who he didn't want to lie to. "Hermione is a brilliant young lady, it's rather plain to see that crowd could easily be considered 'intellectually challenged'. I had a very large cousin who beat-up anyone who even spoke to me, far less try to befriend me. You can possibly understand why Hermione and I weren't seen together in public too often. Now that I no longer live with my relatives the need for hiding has passed and the gloves can come off. We won't stand for behaviour like that from anyone."

Harry knew this wasn't great but making things up on such short notice to save their arses was Hermione's forte, not his. Both Luna and Ginny accepted it though; it was close enough to the truth about their childhoods to be believable.

Hermione was quiet as they made their way back home, heading directly for their room the moment she entered the house. Harry excused himself from the two girls and followed his wife up the stairs. As he entered the bedroom, she was standing with her back to him and facing out the window.

Her voice was shaky as she spoke without turning around, "Harry, I don't know who I am anymore. What I just did is so out of character that I don't know what came over me!"

Harry had his arms comfortably around her as she leaned back, resting her head on his chest. "Hermione love, I knew exactly what you were going to do today, remember I was there when you smacked Malfoy silly back in third year. You are the same Hermione who told Hagrid's giant brother off in sixth year. You my love are a formidable woman, unfortunately in the body of a twelve year old girl."

Harry could see that got her thinking so decided to speak about a subject that they'd danced around for three weeks. "Hermione, why

didn't you tell me what that bastard had done to you that morning in Hogwarts?"

He felt her body immediately stiffen in his arms but continued to gently hold her, trying to express what he felt for her through his touch.

Eventually she answered, "Harry, I know exactly what you would have done and didn't want you to get into trouble."

"Hermione, it doesn't work like that! I love you and want to be there for you, that's one of the reasons why we're married. Even back then you were the most important person in my life. Would I have killed him, unquestionably! Him and anyone else who tried to stop me. Would there have been repercussions, again beyond a doubt but I still would have done it. Instead we ended up dealing with it six months later and got murdered by the ministry as way of thanks."

Hermione's shaky voice indicated just how troubled she was, "I understand where you're going with this Harry, we should deal with our problems before they can become worse. I mostly agree with that but there's a part of me screaming I don't have the right to make these decisions. I'm scared Harry, I'm scared of losing who I am by acting this way." She attempted to offer up an explanation, "The Ron we're planning to murder hasn't done anything to merit it yet, I look at the changes in Ginny and wonder if he doesn't deserve the same chance."

Harry had moved her hair and was now gently kissing her neck in between speaking softly to Hermione, "Can I ask you something? Do you think me or Neville would ever have done that to you?"

"NEVER!" was her immediate and loud reply.

Harry continued what he was doing, speaking softly to her. "There's your answer love, Ron came back for more and only me getting there in time stopped the bastard. Something like that has to come from within, as you so rightly said Neville or me could never do it. Ron accepted that as a pureblood you were his plaything, not something you can change or I will ever allow to happen."

He gently turned her around to face him, "For us it's only been three weeks since he broke into this house and took you away, anyone trying that now is in for a very nasty surprise courtesy of our goblin friends. Halloween is going to be brutal, why don't we head to Australia after it? Whether it's a holiday or something more permanent we can decide after we're there." He kissed away the tears that were running down her cheeks, "I didn't come back in time to save the world, I came back for you!"

Hermione responded by kissing him back, "Can we do that? What about everyone else?"

"We can do anything we like love, I have no intention of saving Britain if the cost is my wife suffering a breakdown. Let's do what we've got planned until Halloween and then leave. No one is more important to me than you. We've really only had that time in Australia with mum and dad to relax, and I now know you would have spent most of that berating yourself over what happened."

She held him tighter, amazed at how well Harry knew her. "If only we could get the diary away from Malfoy, then we wouldn't need to come back."

"I'm ready to take any chances that are offered, if the powers that be are listening we could use a little help with this one."

Hermione had a brainwave, "Why don't we talk to Sirius about it, he'll be upset that we're handing the recovery of the ring over to the goblins. This would allow him to help and you know there's no love lost between him and Lucius."

"You my dear are a genius! We can discuss it with the family on Tuesday, I vote we take the entire day off school and check the new house as well. I wonder if our builder has any contacts down under, or would fancy a little working vacation."

Hermione wore a quizzical expression, so he gave her the answer she was looking for. "We've already designed the perfect house for us, let's have one in Australia and one in Devon. I have no intention

of forgetting our friends so there will be a lot of visiting no matter what our final decision is."

Hermione proceeded to administer their most passionate kiss to date, it was a dazed but very happy Harry who asked his most important question yet. "What was that for? I'm only asking so I can be sure to do it again, with a reward scheme like that hopefully soon!"

"That was for just being you, the person who knows me best in the whole wide world. I have been driving myself crazy, over-thinking our choices and analysing the arse out of everything. I will probably feel guilty about it afterward but I do want him to pay. If we can get Lucius so much the better, him I won't feel anything but relieved that the bastard is finally gone. Molly has lost her home, any respect her family had for her and, eventually, two of her sons. If she stays out of our way I can live with that as a punishment."

Harry could see by the way she was looking at him that this was something she needed, it was almost like a confirmation that she wasn't going dark. The question he had to ask himself was could he trade Ron's death for Molly's life, whatever that life was now. When she looked at him like that, he could deny her nothing. "Ok love, I can live with that if you can."

A repeat of their earlier kiss told him she could, sometimes it was good to be Harry Potter.

Harry could see the determination back in her eyes and was greatly relieved, he would have hated to go behind her back to deal with Ron. He would still have done it though, that image of him standing over a bruised and battered Hermione was burned into his brain. Only Ron's death had any chance of allowing it to fade.

"Oh Harry, we've been such terrible hosts. Luna and Ginny must be wondering where we are?"

"Don't worry love, your mother was leading them away to watch the Little Mermaid. We better get some Gillyweed in for Australia!"

They happy couple walked hand in hand down the stairs to rejoin their friends.

-oOoOo-

Molly Weasley thought her new life sucked! She was irritable, sweating buckets from working in the intense heat and starting to get really pissed-off at the way the local men ogled her as if she was the tastiest thing on the menu. Molly would be the first to admit she had never been what traditionally could be considered beautiful, even as a teenager her most flattering description had been that 'pleasantly plump' girl. Unused to the attention, the stares of these men annoyed her even more, it was as if they were calculating how many camels she was worth. What really had her worried was that things were so bad between her and Arthur, the head of the Weasley family might accept if the offer was high enough.

Bill's contacts had led them to a bar in Cairo, a bar that the owner was considering selling. It had a three bedroom flat above the bar and plenty of room for an extension out the back. They had haggled for hours before reaching a compromise, they would run the bar for six weeks with the option to buy at the end of it.

Molly was now working wherever she was needed, be it in the kitchen or behind the bar. All three Weasleys could see this was a terrific opportunity to earn a living, with accommodation already available. Financially it would take all they had and require a massive effort from the entire family but here was their way back to being able to hold their heads up again. Owning your own business was not to be sneezed at, even if it was just a bar in downtown Cairo.

The owl that arrived from Muriel highlighted exactly how tenuous their position was.

"But Arthur, we have to go back or at least I do! How can we sleep at night not knowing what happened to our son?"

Arthur was not for moving, "Our son who chose to run away over a stupid badge and a girl he hadn't even spoken to! We're barely managing here with the three of us working flat out. When you take in

the expense of a trip home and hiring someone to replace you then I have to say no."

Molly was now crying as Arthur further explained his decision, "The future of our whole family now rests on this venture. We need to save enough gold to bring them all here for the summer and pay their next year's tuition at Hogwarts, a year that will see Ginny joining the boys. I'm really sorry Molly but it has to be this way, I'll write to Charlie and see if he can get a couple of days off, he's much closer anyway."

Bill gave his opinion, it actually matched his father's, "If there was something we could do to help, you know this decision would be different. There's nothing we can do that the ministry and Dumbledore won't already be doing. Muriel's there and if Charlie can get over for a few days then that's the best we can accomplish for now. Percy acting like a love lost teen is certainly unexpected but it's always the quiet ones."

Arthur understood this was extremely hard for Molly, it was not an easy decision for him to make either. "By the time we got there, Percy could even have been found. If not, we know he's a resourceful young man who knows how to look after himself." With his first display of kindness since this situation blew up on them, Arthur placed his arm around his wife's shoulders.

"He's run away from home Molly, young men have been doing that since the beginning of time. Britain is a much safer place now and he knows how to use his wand. He'll be fine."

Molly could see their point of view, the mother in her didn't agree with it for a second but she could still see it. One of her babies was lost and she wouldn't be happy until she was crushing him in her arms again, closely followed by the rollicking of his life! She asked her husband for the only thing she knew that could bring her some comfort.

"Arthur, could we ask Muriel to ship my clock out to us. We can tinker with it and try to get it working properly again. I would feel much better if I could at least see their hands on the clock."

Arthur understood how much it was costing Molly not to be racing back to Britain, he had been quite hard on her recently and this was a perfectly reasonable request.

"Ok Molly, I'll write to Charlie first. If he's going to Britain, he could collect it from Muriel. It'll get here quicker if he ships it from Romania."

With a quick letter penned and sent to Charlie, the three Weasleys got back to work.

-oOoOo-

Dan and Emma didn't benefit from the kids using Hermione's new portkey to Hogwarts, they still had to drive Ginny and Luna to the Leaky Cauldron so the girls could floo home. They had just entered the bar when Ginny let out an ear-piercing scream before pouncing on a redheaded man, cries of 'Charlie' left no one in any doubt who this was.

Charlie was spinning Ginny around but his mind was spinning at a much higher rate of knots as he tried to get a fix on what the hell was going on. He'd heard from Xeno that both girls were spending the weekend with these people, then his baby sister walks in looking a million galleons and happier than he'd seen her. She also dropped a rucksack that was obviously new and appeared to be bursting at the seams.

He was dragged over by Ginny to be introduced, "You know Luna, This is Emma and Dan Granger. They're Hermione's parents and I suppose Harry's too."

Charlie didn't understand the situation but that was no excuse for displaying bad manners, "Hi Luna, Mr and Mrs Granger, I'm Charlie Weasley."

Dan shook the young man's hand without hesitation, "Are you the brother who Ginny tells us works with Dragons?"

Charlie instantly liked these people, anyone who could make his sister smile like that got a big thumbs up in his book. "Yes, on a

dragon reserve in Romania. I'm in London to see this little one before heading up to Scotland and visiting Hogwarts. We're trying to discover what's happened to Percy."

Emma felt terrible and didn't know what to say, "Oh we haven't met him yet, Fred and George are a lot of fun though."

This had Charlie even more confused until Ginny began to tell him about her weekend. Dan smiled as he interrupted the bubbly girl, "We'll leave you two with Charlie and see you next Saturday."

Luna immediately hugged them both goodbye and Ginny quickly followed her best friend's example. Charlie's in-built manners took over again. "Thanks for taking the girls, it's easy to see they had a good time."

Emma beamed a smile at the girls, "Oh it was no trouble, it was a pleasure to have them. We'll be neighbours soon anyway and our door will always be open."

Charlie was left wondering just how far out of the loop he was as the couple left the pub, he intended to get some answers from Ginny before heading off to Hogwarts. He had thought the Potters were the bad guys here, if that was the case they had a hell of a way of showing it.

-oOoOo-

It was with an air of trepidation that the Potters entered the great hall on Monday morning, part of them was waiting on someone screaming 'murderers' at them. Instead what they got was a warmer reception than Harry remembered from winning Quidditch matches. The fact that it came from all four houses made it that bit more special, it left them thinking that perhaps things could be changed for the better.

As Hermione sat down at the Gryffindor table, Harry headed for the staff one. He handed McGonagall a letter, "Professor, we will require to be out of school tomorrow on legal business. This is our notification in writing."

Dumbledore almost choked on his food, obviously he was listening to every word. "Nothing too serious I hope?" Minerva asked.

Harry smiled at her, as much fun as it would be to bait Dumbledore some more, he decided the truth could work just as well here. "Well professor, if things go the way our lawyers expect them to, I'll have new parents by tomorrow evening."

McGonagall actually returned his smile, "I'm really pleased to hear that Mr Potter, I was against you being left with those relatives from the very beginning."

Harry was onto that comment in a flash, "Would you mind telling our lawyers that professor? They're determined to get to the bottom of why I was abandoned on that doorstep. Every little scrap of information helps them build their case."

Dumbledore's face now bore the look of someone being told the waiter had taken a piss in their half-eaten lasagne, it certainly curtailed his appetite!

"That would be no problem Mr Potter, what time would suit them?"

"Professor, for what I'm paying them they will come when you say it's convenient." Harry handed her their lawyer's card before turning to find Hermione gossiping with Lavender and Parvati, wonders will never cease!

With the amount of blushing Neville was doing, Harry figured he must be featuring somewhere in the gossip.

Wood stopped him before he had time to sit down, informing Harry there was Quidditch practice on Mondays and Thursdays. Thanks to Hermione's portkey, they would be able to return home after the practice to get ready for tomorrow's hearing.

Harry didn't feel too guilty that his chances of being here when the first match was due to be played were very slim. If things worked out the way they hoped, missing Quidditch wouldn't make his list of things to be concerned about.

It was after all only a game, played in a school competition. After what he had seen and done, it wasn't worth getting upset over. He sat next to Neville, hoping to discover why his face was so red before they had to leave for Herbology.

-oOoOo-

Charlie read Percy's journal and reached the same conclusion as everyone else, his younger brother had done a runner! Minerva gave him the journal to forward to his parents, perhaps they could draw some comfort from it while the search for their son continued.

The former student and his head of house spent so long chatting, McGonagall invited him to stay for lunch, this would also give him the opportunity to talk with his three brothers. Ginny had provided so much information that Charlie was having difficulty believing it all. The Potters had bought the Burrow but had paid a very fair price for it and then apologised to both Weasleys who lost their jobs. There was so much contradictory information concerning the Potters that Charlie would actually like to meet them, he headed toward the great hall beside his favourite professor.

It seemed to the dragon handler that this was his day to be shocked, the Gryffindor Quidditch captain was sitting at the Ravenclaw table chatting to an attractive girl. There were Slytherins, Puffs and Claws sitting at the Gryffindor table while the youngest Weasley male sat beside a Malfoy at the Slytherin table. That last one was the biggest shock of all for Charlie.

Minerva couldn't help but notice Charlie's shock as his eyes scanned the hall, she also couldn't help but smile at the positive changes slowly creeping into Hogwarts. She was a great believer in a student's house being their family but that didn't mean they couldn't be friends with people outside their family. There was even a rumour that one of her young cubs was dating a Slytherin. Apparently Minerva was as surprised at the news as young Mister Longbottom, Miss Bulstrode though looked quite at home sitting right next to him at the Gryffindor table as she ate her lunch.

Charlie found the twins' stories matched Ginny's while Ron's outlandish claims that the blame for everything bar the Cannon's usual run of form lay at the Potters' door. Charlie's raised eyebrow toward the other two had George defending the Potters quite vociferously.

"Both Ron and Percy have some problem accepting the Potters, we don't! They were in the company of at least one Weasley since leaving Hogwarts after their last class on Friday."

Fred took over seamlessly from his twin, "Ginny and Luna met them in the Leaky Cauldron, they then went shopping with Emma while Harry was buying Hermione her birthday gift. They were all out together on Friday evening to a fancy restaurant and we spent all Saturday with them."

George gave Charlie his thoughts, "Percy had this whole ideal life planned for himself, it wasn't much of a plan if losing your prefect's badge ruined it. Ron here is also building his own little fantasy world, have you seen who he hangs about with? His group insults the Potters and their friends every chance they get, so much so that the five of them are practically ostracised by the rest of their year group."

Fred agreed with his twin, "Ron sees Harry's money, fame, youngest seeker in over a hundred years and instantly becomes a jealous arsehole. Harry and Hermione are great and our Ginny thinks the world of them, only Ron here and Malfoy think badly of the couple. Brilliant company to be in there little brother!"

Despite Ron's protestations, the elder Weasley was convinced. He glanced over at the two kids who were surrounded by their friends and could see why Ron was jealous, the Malfoy boy was sitting being ignored by everyone and looking seriously miffed about it. Why Ron had aligned himself with that hated family was a mystery to him.

It was time to head back to London and check on any progress the ministry may have made in their investigation. Xeno had offered him a bed for the night which he gladly accepted, not only would he get to spend more time with Ginny but could put off seeing Muriel until

tomorrow. That was a win-win scenario as far as Charlie Weasley was concerned.

-oOoOo-

Harry had forgotten how much he loved playing Quidditch, or how much of a taskmaster Oliver was. Feelings of guilt about almost certainly not being available for the match were quickly quashed by the image of another Hogwarts Quidditch captain lying dead in a cemetery. Cedric's life and Hermione's health were way more important. When he had originally accepted the position they had intended to be here, for Harry to withdraw now would immediately lead to questions being asked. These were questions that they certainly didn't want to answer so he was forced to continue as normal.

The practice ended and Harry flew down to the waiting Hermione, riding his new Nimbus two thousand Sirius bought him after hearing Harry made the Quidditch team. Hermione surprised him by jumping on the back and wrapping her arms tightly around his waist.

"What? We still need to get outside the wards and this sure beats walking. Home James!"

Harry couldn't help but laugh at her chauffeur comment, he answered 'Yes Ma'am' before flying off toward the edge of the wards. They waved to Remus on the way past before landing to use the portkey.

-oOoOo-

The three occupants of the house heard the laughter the moment they arrived in the bedroom, the couple walking down the stairs was quite the sight.

Seeing his godson in Gryffindor Quidditch robes, his racing broom in one hand and his girl on the other arm warmed the marauder's heart. "Merlin Harry, you've never looked more like your father than you do at this moment. You know we'll all be coming to see you play, against Slytherin too, I can't wait."

Harry hated doing what he was about to do as he hadn't seen Sirius this excited ever. "Em Sirius, you might have to wait. That game is scheduled for November the ninth, we hope to be in Australia by then."

As much as Sirius was deflated, Dan and Emma were over the moon, "What made you change your minds?" Emma asked.

"If we can pull off what we're attempting I want to take Hermione away from here, whether it's a holiday or becomes something a bit more permanent is something we should decide as a family once everything has settled down a bit." Harry could see the disappointment written all over his godfather's face so decided to throw the old dog a juicy bone.

"Sirius, we have a vitally important task that we would like your help with. It's safe to say the entire outcome will depend on it."

Sirius was now very interested, feeling like a spare wheel was not something he enjoyed.

Hermione sealed the deal when she showed concern over his health and abilities, "Sirius this could be very dangerous, if you don't feel ready for this task then you honestly have to tell us."

The big kid just rolled his eyes, "Guys I'm ready for anything! What do you need me to do?"

Harry laid it out for him, "Lucius Malfoy has something we need very badly, whatever it takes is worth it providing you don't end up back in Azkaban. He's an evil, lying, conniving bastard so you need to be careful and not dick around with this!" Harry had told him how his cousin got the better of him while Sirius was trying to be too clever, Lucius had to be taken very seriously.

"All our plans require that diary to be in the hands of the goblins. If it can be accomplished before Halloween I'll even get 'Padfoot is the greatest!' tattooed on my bum."

"That will be right next to 'Hermione is better' dear?"

Harry gave a very audible gulp in pretence he was scared of his wife, "I was planning on having that on my chest, right over my heart dear."

Dan couldn't hold his laugh, "Oh good save there Harry."

Sirius wasn't laughing, the thought of taking on Lucius Malfoy had focused his mind like nothing before. The plans currently racing through his head were getting wilder and more outlandish but still they weren't quite right. Nothing less than total humiliation was good enough for the head of the Malfoy family.

His grin was feral as Hermione added on another task, "Sirius, if you could free our friend Dobby at the same time I might just have to get matching tattoos with my husband."

The wicked glint in his eyes boded ill for the blond death eater, "I'll do better than that, consider it a late wedding present."

All four could see the vitality almost flow back into the marauder. Not only was he able to be useful again, they were trusting him with something of vital importance. Sirius Black was back in the game and Lucius Malfoy's days were numbered.

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 14

Neville sat down to breakfast and was soon joined by Millie, "Morning Neville, where's Harry and Hermione?"

"Oh hi Millie, they have some business to take care of in the muggle world. Hermione's parents are going to become Harry's guardians, you need to be at least sixteen before you can marry there. This move will cover them legally and stop eyebrows being raised at them living together."

Millie was thrilled, this was the most Neville had said to her so far. She had quickly recognised his almost paralysing shyness for what it was and her determination to coax him out of that shell of his seemed to grow stronger with each passing day. She'd known what Harry and Hermione were doing today, but Millie was resolved to use any tool or technique available to her in her bid to get Neville talking and comfortable in her presence.

This was going to be a long term project but Millie was positive the results would be more than worth it. She may have been amongst the first to recognise the wizard that Neville could grow into but she sure wouldn't be the last. Millie's plan was a fairly simple one, become Neville's friend, hopefully girlfriend before the better looking girls came sniffing around and she lost any chance she had. Nice guys like Neville were extremely hard to find, Hermione didn't waste anytime in taking her boy off the market.

Neville was also thrilled, he'd just managed to hold a conversation with a girl without stuttering, stammering and generally behaving like the village idiot. He liked having Millie as a friend but the girlfriend rumours and the accompanying teasing made him blush, surely she couldn't be interested in him? It was also a revelation to be gently teased by his friends, a far cry from what he expected boarding the Hogwarts express.

Glancing around the hall he could quickly see the trend that began after their trip to the theme park was not only continuing but spreading, people were sitting with their friends irrespective of house.

The only table not to participate was of course Slytherin, it remained exclusively attended by students bearing green on their robes. There were five Slytherin first years spread over the other three tables but no one else had risked sitting at their house table yet. Malfoy's almost permanent scowl and Weasley's eating habits might have had something to do with that though.

Millie asked Neville a question about his Herbology homework and he agreed to meet her later in the library to help, maybe she was interested in him as a boyfriend? Until he met Harry and Hermione he'd never even had a friend before, his utter dread of rejection would probably mean Millie would need to ask him out!

Neville though was totally unaware that Millie, being a very smart girl, had already figured that out. She would just bide her time and wait for the right moment.

-oOoOo-

Harry was disappointed in the courtroom, too many years of spying from his cupboard as his Aunt Petunia watched her legal dramas left him expecting more. There was no jury and the judge didn't wear a wig, as he was follically challenged Harry thought this might have made Judge McGhee appear a bit more impressive. Although this was Harry's first dealings with the muggle legal system, he had been tried twice and instigated his godfather's trial in the magical world. Although the outcome of the last one was everything they could have hoped for, Harry was hoping for a bit less drama here today.

Appearances were apparently deceptive as the balding, middle-aged judge missed nothing. He interrupted the Grangers' lawyer in mid flow. "Mr Wilkes, I am perfectly sure that the paperwork will have every T crossed and I dotted but this is a child's welfare we are dealing with here. I have no intention of granting anything until I personally hear from the lad in question."

Donald Wilkes thought this might happen, McGhee was one of those judges who needed to see things with their own eyes. Although the case was unopposed, he still wanted to speak to Harry. "Your Honour,

Mr Potter is here now and more than willing to answer any questions you may have."

Harry was wearing what he now considered was his lucky suit, it had been worn on the day Sirius gained his freedom and the umbitch got her just deserts. He received hugs from all his family except Sirius, the marauder didn't want to cloud the issue of his godfather sitting there and not applying for custody so was currently in Gringotts on business. There was also the question of why he didn't intercede sooner that they really couldn't answer. Finishing with a hug and a peck on the cheek from Hermione, he made his way to the indicated chair, thankfully without the attached chains.

He found Judge McGhee's gaze to be penetrating but in a kindly manner, his whole purpose appeared to be ascertaining what was best for Harry. He couldn't say that about too many people he'd met in his life.

"Harry, could you please introduce me to the people who accompanied you here today?"

Harry imagined himself in this position when he was eleven and acted appropriately, "Oh this is mum and, sorry it's Mr and Mrs or should that be Dr and Dr?" Harry knew he was laying it on thicker than with a bricklayer's trowel but was playing it for all he was worth today. The mum and dad slip had been deliberate, as was the Dr comment, this was something he really wanted. "This is Dan and Emma Granger, the young lady with them is my best friend Hermione."

The joy on Harry's face as he spoke about his family couldn't be manufactured by the best child actors, the judge picked up on this immediately.

"Would it be fair to say you like staying with the Grangers?"

Harry adamantly shook his head, "No Sir, I love staying with the Grangers. Like is reserved for less important things, bacon sandwiches and coca-cola. What it means to me to stay with the Grangers goes way beyond like!"

The sincerity in Harry's words shone through and had already made the judge's mind up on the placement. What disturbed him was why this case was uncontested, this was highly unusual given the child had stayed with the Dursleys for ten years.

"Harry, I understand from the paperwork your aunt and uncle were as happy to see you go as you obviously were to leave. Could you please tell me in your own words what happened the day you left?"

Harry thought of the best way to put this across, "Hermione has been my best friend for many years and I get on brilliantly with her parents. We were all sitting chatting when I let slip some facts about my living conditions at my aunts, ten minutes later I was in the Grangers' car heading over there. Since they claimed I was dumped on them, and they never wanted me in the first place, they couldn't wait to sign the forms. In my short time at the Grangers I've finally discovered what being part of a family feels like."

The judge had been doing this for nearly twenty years and had developed a sixth sense when someone was spinning him a tale. Since his bullshit detector was currently sending out no alarms, he was left with the option that the boy was telling the truth. This was obviously not the whole truth though it raised some other points that would have to be considered.

"Harry I'm left thinking that your home life with the Dursleys was not all it should have been. I understand you have a cousin, this leaves me wondering if that young man is in any danger in that house?"

Harry tried not to laugh, he really did. It took a couple of minutes for him to regain his composure enough to be able to answer the judge. "Sorry about that sir, the only way my cousin would be in any danger in that house would be if he hurt himself in a temper tantrum. Even they are restricted to the odd occasion that he doesn't get his own way. As I've never seen one lasting longer than two minutes before his parents give in, the danger is minimal."

The judge thought about this before deciding he would have them investigated anyway, something didn't ring true here. He then passed one of the easiest judgements he'd done in a long while. "Mr Potter,

I've rarely seen a boy more in tune with the people who've applied to be his guardians. I have no hesitation of awarding that right to the Grangers."

The smiles coming from the now family of four illuminated the room.

-oOoOo-

Albus felt a tightness in his chest as Remus escorted the Potters' lawyer into Hogwarts for their appointment with Minerva. The headmaster felt like a trapped animal, aware of the approaching storm but unable to do anything about it. All the experience and advantages he'd spent decades building had been whittled away until even his own students no longer respected him, far less held him in the reverence Albus felt he'd not only earned but deserved.

He could find no trace of this mystery author who was writing a devastating expose of his life, nor it would seem do anything to stop both Potters and Black dragging him to court. The Potters had very effectively courted the support of the ministry, the British wizarding public as well as the staff and students of Hogwarts.

Dumbledore was left not only without allies but facing trouble and condemnation no matter which direction he turned. It all hinged with the Potters, Albus could no longer think in terms of just Harry. That wife of his was as fierce as a tiger in defence of her mate, leaving the old headmaster with no idea where to turn next.

He had cast his bait into the water and now, like fishermen the world over, was forced to sit patiently and wait for the fish to make its move. Albus was worried that any trial could see him out of the castle for a prolonged period, leaving your hook unobserved was the surest way of losing your bait. In this high stakes game he was playing, that was not an option he could contemplate.

Albus decided to wait until Halloween before thinking of removing the stone from Hogwarts, if the Potters and Sirius Black were successful in the courts then he didn't think he would be spending Christmas in the castle. He wasn't worried about being flung into Azkaban, Fawkes would have him out of there in a flash. His greatest concern was

losing the position of Headmaster, that would start the downward spiral toward becoming Albus Nobody.

His biggest problem at the moment was not being in control of everything, this was something Albus had not experienced for many, many years and he definitely didn't like it. At the moment he didn't even have control over his own destiny, far less anyone else's. No, Albus Dumbledore did not like this feeling one bit.

Ron Weasley had to do something, his entire Hogwarts experience was turning sourer than last month's milk. He tried hard not to stare at how the rest of his year mates were spending lunchtime, talking, laughing and joking with each other, comparing this to what he had available to him did not make for pretty viewing. Draco was so insanely jealous of Potter that he wouldn't actually speak of it, only his father's direct orders stopped the blond boy from plotting some form of revenge. Pansy was Pansy, the only thing she was interested in was Draco. Crabbe and Goyle were harder to get a read on, that could be because there was nothing there to actually read!

Ron couldn't spend the next seven years like this. He never expected to be the centre of attention but to be sidelined and completely ignored was as unexpected as it was unacceptable. Again his mental focus shifted to what the redhead attributed the root of all his problems to, Potter!

He needed something to bring the golden boy down a peg or two, just to let everyone see their idol wasn't perfect. Ron decided the hat must have placed him in Slytherin for a reason, it was time to be sneaky about the situation. One gesture wasn't going to turn this around but any dent in the golden git's shininess would be a start.

He then had a brainwave, challenge the arse to a duel at midnight. Not only would he be safely tucked up in bed, he would make sure Filch and that bloody cat of his were lying in wait for them.

A spell of detention should tarnish the gloss of Mr Perfect and spoil any plans they had for the weekend, it wasn't much but at least it was a start. His pause for thinking over, Ron went back to what he does best, eating.

-oOoOo-

Harry was also having lunch, sitting in a very nice restaurant with his new legal guardians, his godfather and of course Hermione, his wife who wouldn't tell him what she was cooking-up that required the help of the goblins. While Harry had been at Quidditch practice last evening, Hermione had used the map and cloak to remove a certain item from the room of requirements. After handing Ravenclaw's diadem over to Barchoke for removal of Voldemort's horcrux, she had casually said that the matter she had written to him about could now proceed.

It had been a very busy meeting with Barchoke confirming that the purchase of the Gaunt and Riddle land would go ahead within days. He also provided brochures of plots of land for sale in their preferred Australian locations, Hermione's attempt to slip that past was caught by her husband. Between her refusal to tell him what she was up to and the constant 'wait and see' reply from Sirius regarding his plans for the diary, Harry would normally be working himself into a strop.

This was not a normal day though, today he never had to see the Dursleys ever again while mum and dad officially became just that, mum and dad. Nothing was going to spoil his good mood today, especially since he was conducting his own correspondence with the goblins, he was just sneakier about it.

Both Harry and Hermione felt a bit like jugglers as they tried to keep their eyes on everything that was happening around them, they agreed though that this was so much better than bumbling about with only the meagre clues Dumbledore saw fit to drop in their direction. It was also important to them that they did not step over the line where they were manipulating people, Remus and Tonks aside, they were letting people see different options and allowing them to choose for themselves.

He was glad his theory about Dumbledore appeared to be correct, that of a powerful old wizard living off his past glories. He hadn't taught a class for forty-five years and his contact with students appeared to be observing them at mealtimes, no wonder he had a

hard time understanding two muggle raised students. The old wizard may be a powerful genius but his eccentricities would have generated multiple alarms in the muggle health care system. The alternative to this view would mean Dumbledore was aware of far too much to remain a light sided wizard. Harry's treatment at Privet Drive, Quirrell, the Basilisk, Sirius being innocent, Crouch Jr and that bloody tournament were just some of the things that sprang to mind. If Dumbledore was the all-knowing, all-powerful wizard he tried to portray himself as, these events must have been at least known, if not engineered by the headmaster. Dealing with one dark lord was quite enough without having another orchestrating events from the wings. Yes they intended to ruin Dumbledore's reputation but when the alternative was watching him die, Harry had no qualms about what they were doing.

He was also delighted to see the change in Hermione since they decided they would be heading out of the country after Halloween, knowing she didn't have to face Ginny after Ron's date with the troll had brightened her mood considerably. Whether the move became permanent would depend entirely on the British magical community, they had provided some nudges and even downright pushes but it was still going to be up to the people to decide. One thing was for sure though, they wouldn't be caught coming back to Britain unawares this time. If things went pear shaped again, they would just make Australia their home and coax as many of their friends to join them as they could.

After lunch they were all travelling down to the new home, Hermione's portkey necklace had an extra destination placed on it for easier commuting. She didn't bother asking how the goblins knew the location, she just correctly assumed that Harry was having top of the range wards installed there as well. The owner of the building firm had promised to be on site to meet with them, when Harry mentioned he had a proposition for him the man appeared very eager to be there. He and Hermione figured it would be easier to have the same contractors build an exact copy of the house they'd just finished, only difference would be the location. They would have to be leaving soon to keep their appointment. Mum had been on a high since the court room, the pictures in the brochures increased her excitement and they were now going to visit their new Devon home. Probably just as

well she didn't have any wine with lunch as she was already high enough!

Harry had misread the situation though, visiting her new home and planning on where to build their next one was very exciting for Emma, but it didn't even come close to what happened in the courtroom this morning. Today Emma Granger got the son she'd always wanted, just not in a manner she could have envisaged.

-oOoOo-

Charlie was getting short on time, he still had to visit Muriel and collect mum's clock. Ginny though was insisting that he visit the site of their old home. Charlie was reluctant but it would make his sister happy and mean less time to spend with Muriel, how could he say no to that?

Emma's day was getting better and better, their new home was all they had dreamed and designed. The real clincher though was being told they could move in at the end of the month, realism then hit Emma with a vengeance. That was next week and they'd never be ready!

Hermione could see where her mother's mind was racing, "Mum, don't panic. You have three people who can perform magic staying in the house, we can shrink everything into a couple of trunks before driving down here and expanding it again.

Harry then revealed some of his secret dealings with the goblins by handing Emma a credit card in her name, "This is to buy anything you need for the house, please also use it to book the flights once we've settled on a destination."

This earned Harry a massive hug from his new mum and a 'you'll be explaining that later' look from his wife, both left him feeling very happy.

The contractor meanwhile had been having a quick word with his workers, all were very keen to head off to Australia and build their second Potter home. When he considered the prestige, the profit and

missing a month of the British winter to enjoy Australian sunshine, there really was no decision to make. They would all be spending the month of October in Australia.

Harry and Hermione heard the voices of their friends calling on them, turning they immediately spotted Luna and Ginny running toward them. That they were accompanied by Charlie caused Hermione to draw her wand, she didn't expect to need it but appearances had to be maintained.

Charlie's mixed feelings about seeing his old home disappeared the instant he laid eyes on the site. The area before him bore as much relation to the Burrow as a Komodo Dragon did to a Hungarian Horntail. It wasn't just the beautiful house either, the entire landscape had changed beyond recognition. As he watched his sister and Luna race to greet their friends, he was rather surprised to see the girl draw her wand and hold it at her side the instant she caught sight of him. He was not surprised that she then tracked his every movement, Charlie was positive that if his behaviour was in any way threatening, this girl would be firing curses first and asking questions later.

Charlie said hello to the Grangers and was introduced to Sirius Black before he felt compelled to say something about the situation. "Excuse me Miss, I mean you no harm. There really is no need for you to have your wand in hand."

Hermione's response was not what Charlie expected. "I'm not a Miss but Lady Hermione Potter. You claim to mean us no harm but experience has taught me that, until I get to know them then no one can be trusted."

"That's a pretty grim view of life you have there Lady Potter."

Hermione came right back at him, "When you're sitting in school eating breakfast and your husband gets attacked by a madwoman, there really isn't a lot of options left open to you."

Charlie had no answer to that, especially when Ginny threw in her two Knuts worth. "Mum would have gone for a repeat performance in the Leaky Cauldron if dad hadn't silenced and put a full body bind on

her. Sorry Charlie but Hermione is right to be careful, I know you would never do anything like that but they don't. Fred and George got the same treatment until they were found to be trustworthy."

This actually drew a semblance of a smile from Charlie, "I'm not sure whether to be more upset that Lady Potter doesn't trust me or that she trusts the twins more. I don't think I've ever been so insulted in my life."

This broke the ice between him and the Potters though Hermione still didn't put her wand away, appearances had to be maintained. "If you don't mind, the twins are friends of ours. I've never met a sensitive Weasley before, far less one who's a dragon handler."

Ginny couldn't help but burst out laughing at Hermione's quip, the idea of Charlie being sensitive was just too funny.

Harry was smiling too as he spoke to their friends, "Girls we hope to be moved in here by next weekend, you know our door is always open to you. Hermione now has a portkey that will bring us directly here so we'll meet you at this house on Saturday."

Luna had to ask, "What are you guys doing here, shouldn't you be at Hogwarts today?"

Hermione actually blushed at the explanation, even though she was really nineteen, missing school was not something to do lightly. "We had court this morning and bunked off school for the rest of the day. We just had to see how the house was progressing."

Charlie was surprised but delighted at how well the four youngsters got on together. Hearing Ginny talk about her friends was one thing, seeing them interact was totally different. The young girl may have introduced herself as Lady Potter yet there were no airs or graces between the three girls. Charlie understood the 'lady' bit was a defence mechanism against being treated like a child.

Ginny had told him the girl was very smart and extremely powerful, the dragon handler was beginning to come down on the side of the

Potters. Ginny was happier than he'd seen her and the twins were singing their praises too, Ron was the lone voice of discontent. If dad and Bill had no trouble with the young couple, who was Charlie to rock the boat!

-oOoOo-

Charlie's visit to his aunt's was short but certainly not sweet, that woman would still be sour if she was buried up to her armpits in sugar. He hated to think of Ginny staying with this vile woman, she wouldn't be the happy, vivacious young girl he saw today if she lived under this roof. Charlie was forced to listen as this septic old spinster denounced and degraded every single member of the Weasley clan, by the time her rant had reached Ginny he'd had more than enough. Charlie dealt with real dragons daily, as poisonous as Muriel was she's a pale imitation to the real thing.

The anger in his voice was unmistakable as he gave the bitch a taste of her own medicine, "My sister is far better off where she is. Not only does she have friends and people who care for her, she doesn't have to endure your grating voice proclaiming how worthless she is at least four hundred times a day. I have a younger brother who's missing and all of your concern is focused on a perceived slight upon your person! I shall be writing to my parents tonight and recommending they change the name on the Hogwarts contact list to me. I can get to Scotland reasonably easily and I can't imagine any of my family approaching you for help."

Muriel was beyond angry and three streets past furious, these ungrateful Weasleys had no sense of gratitude whatsoever. With speed that belied her age, she drew her wand and blasted Molly's clock to smithereens. "Take your trash and yourself out of my home, neither you nor any of your tribe will ever cross my doorway again."

Charlie was well aware that was his mother's prized possession this vindictive old bitch had just destroyed, there was also no doubt Muriel understood exactly what she was doing.

"Listen you vindictive old bat, if I have anything to do with it, no Weasley will ever set foot in this house again. My father must have

been desperate to even consider this as an option, personally I would rather stay in Azkaban than here. I'll bet dementors would have no effect on you, there would be no happy memories for them to feed on. Hell they would probably recognise a kindred spirit, like them you can suck all the happiness out a room just by entering. I'll bid you goodbye and never intend to set eyes on you again."

Charlie stormed out, leaving a speechless Muriel behind. He was trying to figure out what to do now that his mother's clock was destroyed. He had a glimmer of an idea but would have to move fast if he intended to pull it off.

-oOoOo-

Next morning an owl delivered a thick envelope to the Weasleys in Cairo, it was with shaking hands that Arthur opened it. He pulled out Percy's journal, five small packets and a goblin bank draft, it was the enclosed letter from Charlie that the three were really waiting on.

Arthur read it out loud to save the other two from waiting to read it.

Mum, Dad and Bill,

I spoke to the ministry and Minerva, all are of the opinion that Percy has run away and currently laying low. I have enclosed his diary which gives a very good insight into what he was feeling at the time. Also spoke with the twins and they confirmed that while Percy was apparently sweet on this girl, he'd never actually spoken to her other than normal class time. While the aurors are actively searching for him, it's not being treated as a high priority as they fully expect him to turn up soon. They will contact me immediately they hear anything.

Twins are very well although Ron appears to have some trouble settling at Hogwarts, apart from the strangeness of seeing a Weasley wearing the green there's also the matter of him being friendly with the Malfoy boy. Both have managed to alienate themselves from the rest of the school due to their continual bad mouthing of the Potters. Ginny on the other hand is happier than I've seen her and getting along brilliantly not only with Luna but her new neighbours the Potters.

I dread to think what she would have turned out like had she been left in the care of that vicious bitch Muriel.

I have to apologise mum, Muriel was bad-mouthing our family something fierce when I had enough and blew my top. The reason I need to apologise is the bitch destroyed your clock in a childish fit of temper. I know you need a hair from each of us for a clock to work so I raced back to Hogwarts to collect three hairs, followed by a trip to see Ginny and then one of my own should cover most of us. I also included a Gringotts draft for as much as I could afford, the twins and Ginny also contributed. They spent last weekend with the Potters at some muggle attraction and Harry refused to take back the muggle spending money he gave them. The goblins converted it to galleons and added it to the draft, I hope it's enough to help with a new family clock. I also want you to write to Minerva, I don't want Muriel to have anything more to do with our family and I will happily travel back from Romania rather than have her poking her nose in.

Will write again soon and contact you the moment I hear any other news from Britain. Hang in there mum, you know he'll turn up!

Charlie

Molly was crying as she held Percy's journal, Bill picked up the Gringotts draft. He agreed wholeheartedly with Charlie that Ginny was better off anywhere other than Muriel's and was mightily relieved to hear his opinion on the Percy situation. "Mum, if we add a bit to this I should be able to get you a clock made before the end of the week."

She was quietly sobbing as she began reading her missing son's diary, by way of an answer she just pulled out one of her hairs and passed it to her eldest.

Arthur removed one of his own from a rapidly declining source, "Keep that safe, the way things have been going lately I'll soon have none left!"

Bill tugged one from his own head and promised to see about a new clock for his mum today.

-oOoOo-

Narcissa Malfoy almost choked on her breakfast as she read the letter that had been delivered by an unknown owl. Lucius couldn't help but notice his normally cultivated and cultured wife spraying coffee over the table, he enquired who the letter was from.

"It's from the head of the Black family. He's citing you belonging to an organisation that murdered his brother as breaking the contract of our marriage. Death eaters killing the heir to the house of Black is more than enough legal justification for this to be quickly passed."

It was now Lucius's turn to do a spit take at the breakfast table, "What? He can't do that! I was under the Imperius curse, everyone knows that."

Narcissa hated pointing out the obvious, a task that she supposed she should be used to by now with the Malfoy males. "It would appear neither Sirius Black nor the goblins believe that claim, the fact that you never stood trial under veritaserum doesn't help your case either. He's already dissolved Bella's marriage and then banished her from the Black family, he's only writing to me in the hope I don't have the dark mark. He's given me two days to meet him and prove this is not the case otherwise I will suffer the same fate. The goblins have also been instructed that, since you broke the contract, the Black family is reclaiming my dowry, plus interest."

Lucius was feeling sick, it was bad enough they were becoming social pariahs but this on top would finish them for good. His wife would have no name, he would have no money and their son would be a bastard. Lucius had to take action and fast, this situation could not be allowed to happen.

"Write to him at once and arrange a meeting, I'm sure we can come to some sort of agreement." Lucius had his hand on the ever present cane with the snake motif, yes they would soon reach an agreement.

Narcissa knew her husband well enough to guess what was going through his mind, "He's not stupid, Sirius will be in a private room at Gringotts between one and two o'clock today and tomorrow. How bad would this be for us financially?"

Lucius was so far into shock he couldn't even lie to his wife, "Disastrous would not be too strong a word. We would have to sell anything we could and flee the country, there would be nothing left for us here."

The rest of Narcissa's breakfast was forgotten about, she'd become accustomed to this way of life and didn't want to see it go. Lording over some peasants in a god forsaken backwater was not her idea of a pleasant future. "Then I suppose I'll have to meet him and beg for mercy!"

Lucius wore a truly evil grin, "No my dear, I will. By the end of the week Draco could be the new Lord Black and all our financial worries will be over. Sirius is going to discover just what it means to cross a Malfoy, a Slytherin will always outsmart a Gryffindor!"

Narcissa hoped her husband was correct, she really didn't want to be starting over with a lot less than she had now. She always thought the dark mark on her beautiful alabaster skin was a massive mistake, if Sirius laid eyes on it she'd neither be a Malfoy or a Black. Narcissa couldn't abide the shame of being a penniless, nameless single mother with a bastard son. She would have to place her faith in her husband and pray he could handle Sirius.

-oOoOo-

In Little Whining a similar scene was being played out at number four Privet Drive, but for an entirely different reason.

Vernon was wiping off the fruit juice his wife had just spat all over him, his growl demanded an explanation from the clearly excited woman.

"Vernon, you won't believe this but after spending all those years entering my 'stupid' competitions, we finally hit the jackpot! I've just won an all expenses paid around the world cruise for two."

Vernon stared at his wife, awaiting the punch line of this very bad taste joke. Instead she handed him the letter to read for himself. The walrus started to become as excited as his wife as everything looked to be the genuine article, an all inclusive five star cruise around the world. Spending the coming winter cruising sunnier climes for free was certainly appealing., in his mind Vernon was already picturing the both of them on the deck of the cruise liner.

He would have to take unpaid leave as his holidays wouldn't stretch to this, Dudley would have to either spend Christmas at Smeltings or with Marge. He intended to investigate this strenuously before saying a word to anyone. When it proved to be genuine then Vernon would soon ensure that everyone heard that he and his wife would be cruising around the world.

Petunia was daydreaming of finally being able to mix with the kind of people she was supposed to be amongst, her bridge club would be green with envy when they heard of her good fortune. Like her husband, Petunia would ensure they heard about it, oh how they would hear about it!

Jessie Wallace managed to mention her trip to Rome at least every third sentence she spoke, Petunia would be dining at the captain's table while visiting exotic places like Cape Town, Hong Kong and Singapore. She wouldn't have to keep mentioning the Rome Coliseum, Petunia would have enough memories and stories never to have to repeat herself for years.

She was going to have to acquire a new wardrobe though, meeting a better class of people would require the clothes to match. Vernon's credit cards would soon take care of that, shopping followed by a luxury cruise. Could it get any better?

A/N Thanks for reading.

I placed a poll on my profile page to give readers a chance to influence what happens to Ron in this story. I have received numerous reviews on the matter and can see all sides of this argument. I will close the poll just before I post the particular chapter

that deals with the troll, whichever option has the most votes at that time will be the one that makes it into the story. if you don't vote then you can't complain about the result!

Chapter 15

Neville was delighted to see the smiles displayed on the faces of his friends on their return to Hogwarts, they lit up the great hall that morning. It was obvious they got the result they were looking for yesterday. Not that Neville was in any way surprised by this, he and everyone else were learning that the Potters usually got what they were after. Tonight they had an extra defence lesson from Remus Lupin and Auror Tonks, the upper years were so jealous. Everyone thought Snape and Quirrell were useless teachers, only Harry and Hermione had actually done something about it.

As the couple sat down beside him Neville couldn't help but think of the differences they'd made to his life, the Slytherin girl sitting on his other side was just one of them. Life just kept getting better for Neville Longbottom as his Hogwarts experience was outshining all his admittedly modest expectations.

-oOoOo-

Tonks left the Grangers sporting blue hair. The auror thought she was so clever springing this surprise on Sirius, he wasn't supposed to know what hit him. How was it then that she found herself standing here like a nervous schoolgirl, fretting over what she would have to do tonight.

She had been looking forward to returning to Hogwarts tonight, after probing her feelings a bit deeper Tonks was astonished to discover the reason why. As a metamorphmagus she discovered quite early that she had to be honest with herself, it was a key fact in being able to control her transformation. She had to know herself and her emotional state, otherwise she could lose herself into the myriad of changes available to her.

The revelation that she was looking forward to tonight because Remus was going to be there made what she had to ask him a hundred times more awkward. It would have been bad enough to ask him on a date as a friend, but now to find out she may actually like him as more than a friend was startling.

Tonks had no illusions of a brave knight on a white steed sweeping her off her feet. She was still surprised though to find that the kind, gentle, funny Remus Lupin had pierced her armour and managed to touch her heart. She would just have to play it cool and see where things led. It's not like this was her first crush on a teacher, she was an auror for Merlin's sake!

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Remus also found himself going about his duties with a spring in his step, he though was under no illusions why that was. Just the prospect of spending some time in the company of the beautiful, funny, pink-haired girl was enough to brighten any day. Remus was enough of a realist to understand these feelings could never be returned. He wasn't bitter or ranting at the world in general for his lot in life, he was a werewolf and this was as good as it got.

In actual fact his life was currently better than at any time since leaving Hogwarts as a student. He had a job, a place to live, his best friend back in his life, the son of his friends thought he was 'cool' and he would be in the company of a beautiful woman tonight as they taught children how to defend themselves.

Yes Remus Lupin was better than he had been in many years. The feeling that fluttered deep within his chest every time he thought of Tonks would have to stay just that, deeply buried. That he could take it out on a lonely night and bask in its warmth was something beyond treasure to the marauder.

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Hermione was the first to notice the tension between Tonks and Remus, even with that tension their lesson was still one of the best defence lessons given in all her years at Hogwarts. Remus had a sense of fun that was still complemented by Tonks, even though she seemed on edge about something tonight.

McGonagall had provided a large classroom yet it was jam-packed with first year students, everyone bar Draco and his crew. They were split into two groups, Remus was teaching them not to let any spell hit

you and the basic shield charm for when you couldn't dodge. Tonks had her students practicing jelly-legs jinxes and stinging hexes, emphasising accuracy above all else.

After each group had mastered their tasks, mock duels were quickly arranged to allow them to practice their newly acquired skills. The groups then swapped to learn offence / defence and complete the lesson.

Remus advised them to practice as next time they would be having a duelling competition using only the spells they'd learned tonight. All the students were buzzing with excitement as they left the lesson, every single one of them thanked Remus and Tonks before filing out the room. Hermione was positive something was going on with the pair so dragged Harry away, leaving only their two teachers for the evening alone in the classroom.

The marauder decided to get straight to the point, Tonks had been hardly able to look him in the eye all evening. "Are you going to tell me what's bothering you, because if I'm supposed to know then I will have to admit to being clueless."

Even with her metamorphic abilities, Tonks was unable to totally eliminate the blush that crept from her neck to her cheeks. "Oh Remus, you haven't done anything. I was trying to be clever and it's kinda backfired on me, well on us actually."

Remus eyebrows shot up as he tried to figure out just what the hell Tonks was talking about, she on the other hand knew she was going to have to tell him the full story. Tonks wasn't sure anymore how she got herself into this position in the first place.

"I arranged a blind date for Sirius with one of my friends." Remus was instantly very attentive, judging by how nervous Tonks was and now adding Padfoot into the mix, this could be bad!

Tonks continued, "Sirius maintains he's not ready to date yet and the only way I could get him to agree was by tagging along as a double date."

Now Remus was confused, Sirius was born ready to date so that excuse was pure fiction. Also Tonks going along for a double date only made sense if she had someone as well. She couldn't mean him, could she?

Tonks knew Remus was smart, the fact that she could see from his expression he'd worked it out only emphasised this point. "He suggested you as my date. He claims that with me and his best friend there, he would be able to relax and is less likely to make an arse of himself."

The werewolf's mind was now racing. If this was a prank then it was a cruel one and Sirius wouldn't do that, not to him at least. Could he be so out of practice at hiding his feelings that Sirius had been able to read him so easily? He could see Tonks growing more and more nervous by the second, he had to act.

"Miss Tonks, would you do me the honour of accompanying me on a date this Friday?"

The relief on her face was clearly visible, Remus figured at worst he would have a very enjoyable evening. He couldn't let himself think that things might go well, those thoughts could lead to heartache. Not a good option for a werewolf.

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Hermione found herself being led by Harry. Not back to their quarters, but to a totally different part of the castle altogether. "Harry, what are you up to?"

He deviously smiled at his young wife, knowing full well how much she hated not knowing something. "We have to go and speak with someone, all will be explained then."

Hermione of course wasn't happy with that answer, only the promise of an explanation soon headed off the Impending storm. For the moment anyway. She was still no wiser when the couple found themselves outside the door of professor Flitwick and Harry was asking if they could speak with him for a moment. As they entered,

Hermione marvelled at the charms placed on the furniture. All the pieces except the professor's chair adjusted to the visitor's size, she wondered rather cheekily if their friend Hagrid ever visited.

The little professor was as excitable as ever and almost bounced with glee at their presence, "Well, this is a most unexpected but pleasant surprise. Does professor McGonagall know you two are here?"

Both Potters really liked the head of Ravenclaw and were never fooled by his diminutive size. Here was a charms master and a warrior of some repute, you underestimated this man at your peril. "No sir. We will of course have to approach her on this matter, though I feel we may need your help with that."

Filius was now as intrigued as Hermione, Harry thought it would be cruel to tease his wife anymore so outlined his request. "Auror Tonks let slip tonight that our visit to the ministry of magic would take place next Friday. It's an event we're all looking forward to but I couldn't help thinking something was missing. Since discovering what it was that kept niggling at my brain, I've made a few enquiries that led me to your door sir. I need your help with organising an official Hogwarts visit to Gringotts."

Filius was very glad he was sitting in his own chair, anything else and he would have slipped off onto the floor in shock. He'd paid careful attention as this couple had instigated a revolution in Hogwarts, the charms professor supported their efforts wholeheartedly. He felt though that they had just overreached themselves. Their lack of knowledge in the magical world betraying their eminently applaudable ambition.

Hermione meanwhile wanted to grab her husband and kiss his socks off for even thinking of the idea. She wasn't sure if they could pull it off but what a coup if they could. They had given their friends a small experience of muggle life, if they could also open their eyes to the treatment of other sentient species then anything was possible. Once bigotry was exposed to the harsh daylight and opened up for examination, it could no longer survive. Only through ignorance and darkness could it thrive, her husband had apparently made it his

mission to deny it both. She really couldn't wait to get him back to their room, damn these young bodies that would deny her doing what she wanted to for a few years yet.

Filius tried to let the young couple down gently, "Mr and Mrs Potter, I find myself extolling your intentions and goals, I fear I must be the bearer of bad news. The chances of the goblin council accepting such a proposal are nonexistent."

Harry's smile was wide and genuine, "You misunderstood me professor, I don't need your help with the goblins. I already have their full agreement and support, it's selling this to the rest of the staff and the ministry we may need some help with."

Filius slowly rose to make them all a cup of tea. Normally he would have used his wand to accomplish this, he didn't feel he could trust his magic right at this moment. He also required the time this would take for the momentous news to penetrate his numbed mind.

Hermione meanwhile had Harry wrapped in a hug while kissing his cheek, that would have to do for now.

The professor's shaky voice came back to them from the little kitchen niche, "If you don't mind me asking, what exactly have they agreed to?"

Harry was enjoying watching the tiny professor trying to play it cool, Hermione had clearly lost that battle as he reluctantly untangled himself from her arms. "Well sir, all the muggleborn will get to open their own vault, the advantages of such will be explained before they do this. I will be covering the fees and placing an initial ten galleons in each of them before we descend in the carts to see their new vaults. We will be shown some of the security measures that protect our investments and have been promised a peek at the famous Gringotts dragons. There will obviously be more but those are the highlights."

The sound of silence coming from their professor encouraged Harry to continue, "What we would like from you is your help in convincing everyone what a wonderful opportunity this is. We could perhaps benefit from a lesson or two in goblin culture so we don't unknowingly

start one of those goblin uprisings professor Binns is so fond of droning on about."

It took a feat of immense concentration to get both cups into the hands of these extraordinary young people without spilling the tea everywhere. The professor's hands were literally shaking from intense excitement. "Mr Potter, I'm not sure you understand the magnitude of what you have achieved here? I'm also more than slightly intrigued as to how you managed it?"

Harry couldn't help but notice Hermione was really looking forward to hearing this bit as well. "Sir, my wife is muggleborn, for all intents and purposes I might as well be too. As two strangers in this new world there are things that make no sense whatsoever. The goblins are a prime example of this. As I mentioned earlier, all we know about them are the rebellions from history class. If that is all there is to know then why in hell do we trust that nation with all our wealth? You would have to be completely nuts to give a so-called hostile foreign power complete and utter control of your country's wealth and economy. Why is there antagonism between goblins and wizards? This is a chance to see with our own eyes what goblins are all about, and hopefully dispel some of the nastier myths bandied about regarding them." Harry hadn't realised he'd climbed onto his soapbox but the fire in Hermione's eyes made it worth the trip.

"To answer your question professor, I wrote to them and asked! When I explained that we would be seeing muggles and magical, yet felt the picture would be incomplete without highlighting their contribution to our world, I got an immediate yes in reply. Now it could be the effect of Harry Potter asking for something, but I got the impression they were delighted just to be asked. I was left thinking that doesn't happen too often in their dealings with wizards."

Filius was beyond shocked now. Could it be as simple as that? Yes the Potter name would undoubtedly have helped but would a request from Hogwarts have met with the same response? There were resources already at the fingertips of the school that had been ignored for decades. It took two newcomers to, not only point them out but seize the opportunities they presented. Filius wondered if it was rather like the story of the emperor's new clothes, if he

remembered correctly it was a child who pointed out that mistake as well. Perhaps they saw a different Albus to everyone else to, it would certainly explain their attitude toward him.

"Mr Potter you have my promise that I will do everything within my power to make this historic outing a reality. I think I can also guarantee that professor McGonagall will also give it her full support. I fear all the opposition will come from the ministry."

Harry was again smiling, "Sir, if we can keep this between ourselves and Professor McGonagall for now, I think we could possibly deal with the ministry. Minister Fudge is sure to be there next week for our visit, and you just know he'll have all the press he can muster there as well. Wouldn't that be just the perfect time to say how much we enjoyed the ministry visit and how it set the precedent for the one graciously offered by Gringotts the following week. Fudge will get his pictures and positive headlines while the goblins will get some good publicity too for a change."

Hermione so wanted to jump her husband right now, cursing this young body for the limits it imposed. She so loved it when he allowed his intelligent side out to play. There was so much more to this man than the boy who jumped on a troll's back to save her. She was the only one who got to see the real Harry Potter.

Filius Flitwick was head of the house where the supposedly intelligent students were placed and was a very hard professor to impress. Harry Potter had just blown him away! He had brilliantly circumvented the ministry and the headmaster to provide his year mates with an experience that had never been available before. The fact that he maintained his wife was the brains of the family was just downright scary!

They chatted back and forth for ages until the professor realised the time, he quickly signed them a permission slip for being out past curfew and shooed them out the door. As the pair walked around the first corner, Hermione pounced on her man. What seemed like hours later, a known voice interrupted their kissing.

"They have their own room, why do they have to be doing this in a corridor after curfew?"

It was with a chuckle that Oliver answered, "They're Gryffindors' Penny, it's the challenge that counts. Though I would hate to see my seeker get detention and miss Quidditch practice, I hope you pair have a good explanation?"

Hermione was blushing profusely but Harry kept his arm around her waist as he handed his captain the acquired permission slip.

In a sotto voice, Oliver asked his girlfriend a question, "What do you think Penny, it might even be genuine?"

Penny could only shake her head at her new boyfriend's question, "Oliver, there is more chance of you giving up Quidditch for ballet than there is of you punishing someone on your team. Besides, I'm a Ravenclaw and recognise my head of house's signature. I think the muggle phrase for these two is 'get a room' but, since they've already got one, I can only suggest they go there right now."

Harry accepted both their slip and the advice in the spirit it was offered. He then led a still blushing Hermione back to their room. Harry couldn't be sure but thought he heard Oliver and Penny laughing as they continued on their rounds.

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Ron had decided to make his big play at the Gryffindor table during breakfast. He reckoned that he couldn't lose, after getting those extra defence lessons last night they would be dying to try them out. Just the phrase 'extra lesson' was enough to ensure Ron didn't attend. He would just stroll up, make a few comments, act all insulted when they answered him back and then issue the challenge to duel. What could go wrong?

He made sure the twins were not there first, he didn't need word of this making its way back to dad. "Hey Potter, I've heard you've been hanging around with my sister. It stops now. She's far too good for the likes of you!"

Harry never even turned around to face the bastard, he didn't want to know if Crabbe and Goyle had accompanied him on this little adventure. Ron's date with destiny was still a few weeks away, He couldn't afford a public confrontation that may see some awkward questions asked later. "Fair enough. I'll tell her what you said when we see her on Saturday."

Ron didn't know what to make of that so decided just to press on regardless. "So, you decided just to ignore my warning? That leaves only one way to settle this, wizard's duel! Midnight tonight in the trophy room, you may bring a second."

Harry and Hermione shared a glance, surely not again! "If you think I'll be traipsing around the school corridors after curfew while you lie in bed and set Filch on me, you must be thicker than I thought. Considering how thick I thought you were in the first place, that's no mean achievement. Looks like the hat was right to place you in Slytherin though, no Gryffindor could ever have come up with that!"

This was not proceeding anything like how Ron had imagined it.

"Now, if that was all you wanted? I would suggest you go back where you came from, before I let Hermione beat you up again."

The resulting laughter from those that heard the exchange proved too much for Ron, combined with his plan disintegrating before his eyes it was too big a blow for his already fragile pride to accept. He drew his wand and quickly fired off a curse he'd heard the twins working on.

Hermione though had her wand already in her hand and a shield charm raised before Ron got his curse off. It reflected straight back at him and everyone sat waiting to see what it would do. Unfortunately they didn't have long to wait. Ron attempted to fire off another curse but emitted an exceedingly loud belch as slugs started dripping off his bottom lip. They hit the floor with a plop at the exact same time everyone in the hall lost any appetite they had left.

McGonagall was at the scene in seconds, transfiguring a plate into a bucket before handing it to Ron so he could catch the dripping slugs.

She also banished the ones that had made it to the floor and were making their break for freedom.

"Mr Weasley. As you are clearly in no condition to answer questions in your present state, I will send you to Madam Pomfrey and speak to you later on this matter. Rest assured, the firing of curses in the great hall will not go unpunished."

Ron attempted to answer the professor, the resulting plops of three slugs passing out his mouth to hit the bucket told him that would be a bad idea. The audible groans of revulsion from all around him was not what he wanted to hear either. As he left the hall Ron now had every pair of eyes on him. The problem with that as far as Ron Weasley was concerned was that he didn't want to be remembered as the boy who belched slugs into a bucket. Not nearly as cool a nickname as the boy who lived.

"That was a very nice shield charm Mrs Potter. I'm tempted to award points to Gryffindor, especially as there was no follow-on action this time." Minerva was glancing along her table, noticing Miss Bulstrode sitting beside Mr Longbottom while Miss Abbott and Miss Bones were chatting to the other two Gryffindor girls.

It was actually Lavender who answered her head of house, "There was no need for any 'follow-on action' professor. We all knew Hermione had it well in hand. Mr Lupin taught us that shield charm last night. He and Auror Tonks were brilliant and we all learned so much."

This statement was greeted by nods of agreement from all the first years. This gave Minerva a new candidate for the post, after its current occupant had fallen prey to the defence curse. She then turned her attention to Harry, "I understand from professor Flitwick that you wish to speak with me? Please come to my office after dinner."

Hermione interrupted, "Professor, Harry has Quidditch practice then. Would it be possible for you to join us for tea in our rooms after it? There is less chance of us being disturbed there." Hermione didn't

want to come right out and say it, but the headmaster wouldn't be able to interrupt.

Harry thought this was a very good idea and added one of his own, "Please extend the same invitation to professor Flitwick as well. We enjoyed his hospitality last evening and would like to return the favour."

Minerva instantly agreed, here was a chance to sit and chat with these two. There would be no ulterior motive, other than trying to figure out the best way to help two of her cubs.

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Sirius was waiting in a specially prepared room, deep inside Gringotts bank. Barchoke and two armed goblin guards were also present as they awaited their visitor. Sirius had been certain that they would wait until the last possible moment before making an appearance. As the walls of the room changed colour when Narcissa Malfoy entered, Sirius and Barchoke shared a grin that their trap had been well and truly sprung. He'd guessed correctly and now the marauder could put his plan into operation. Narcissa Malfoy sat across the small table from Sirius, her tight derriere had no sooner touched the seat when two goblin blades appeared either side of her neck.

"This is an outrage! The minister is a close personal friend of my husband, I shall make sure he hears of this."

Sirius was shaking his head, answering the claims as if dealing with a petulant child, "Tut, tut, tut Lucius! You of all people should know that attempting to conduct business inside Gringotts while impersonating someone else carries very severe penalties. Now you can admit this which will allow us to discuss your rather limited options, or we can sit back and wait for the polyjuice to wear off. I should point out that should you choose the second option, I will be powerless to help you. Once you change back, you will be led from here to a Gringotts dungeon and probably never see the light of day again."

Narcissa / Lucius was sweating now, "You can't do this to me Black!"

Sirius was the epitome of cool, again acting as if he was explaining the facts of the situation to a simple child. "But my dear Lucius, I'm not doing anything. You did this to yourself when you entered this building in that disguise. That dress and those heels will be mightily uncomfortable once you revert back, unless you're into that kind of thing?" Sirius raised a questioning eyebrow as his guest attempted to control their temper.

Lucius realised the hopelessness of the situation, hard not to with two razor sharp blades next to your throat. Admitting nothing yet, he decided to see what this was really about. "What is it you actually want Black?"

Time to get down to business, Sirius put his serious face on. All pretence was now gone, "I want to protect my godson from the monster who killed his parents, you are going to help me do that. You have in your possession a little black book that has T.M. Riddle printed on it. Give it to me and all your troubles can be forgotten."

Lucius was trying to think fast, no one other than his master knew he had that item. How did Black find out? More importantly, how was he going to turn the tables on the former Gryffindor?

"Very well, I'll fetch the book for you."

Sirius smiled at the figure across from him, "I knew you would see sense, but there's no reason for you to travel all the way back to Malfoy manor to collect it. The truth is if that book's not in my hands by the time that potion wears off, I will no longer be able to help you. Still, it should be easier dealing with cousin Narcissa with you out of the picture." A hard edge crept into his voice as Sirius reinforced who was in charge here, "Call your house elf and have him collect it, remember you're on the clock!"

Lucius was still trying to calculate a way out of this, until he managed to get himself out of this room though Black held all the cards. Even giving the book to Black he could always retrieve it at a later date, if the polyjuice ran out then it was all over. "Dobby!"

The downtrodden little elf appeared in an instant, Lucius then provided precise instructions on how to retrieve the item in question. Dobby returned under a minute later and couldn't put the book down onto the table fast enough. It was almost as if the thing had burned his fingers.

Sirius of course couldn't resist going for those bonus points from his godson and his wife. "Now Lucius, for having the audacity to turn up here as my cousin it will cost you. Give Dobby clothes now!"

Lucius was livid, it looked an even stranger expression on Narcissa's face. Sirius got the feeling he was seconds away from telling him he would rue the day he crossed Lucius Malfoy. Instead, he handed the astonished but delighted Dobby a glove.

The little elf was now bouncing up and down on the spot with unabashed glee. "Dobby is thanking you very much master Black. Dobby should have known that someone who was the godfather of the great Harry Potter would have to be great themselves". The happiest elf in the entire world popped out of Gringotts.

Barchoke had confirmed that the diary was the genuine article before Dobby had been given clothes, the goblin now left the room with it to see the evil thing dealt with. Lucius was so engrossed in watching the book be taken away from him that it didn't even register that the other two guards had left as well. When it finally sunk in that there were only the two of them in the room, Black already had his wand out while his was still inside Narcissa's handbag.

A calm feeling then came over his mind as all his troubles were forgotten about. He no longer had a care in the world , except to follow the instructions the voice was placing in his head.

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The minister's secretary was unsure how to deal with this, Lucius Malfoy no longer had unlimited access to the minister but she hadn't been appraised of the situation regarding Mrs Malfoy. This moment of confusion was put to good use.

"Don't worry about it dear, Cornelius will want to see me. I won't take up too much of his time."

As the blond woman entered the minister's office, something about this situation was bothering the secretary. After thinking about it for a few moments, she decided to err on the side of safety. She pressed the button on her desk to summon some help.

Both the aurors who quickly arrived agreed with the secretary's assessment of the situation, they decided to enter the minister's office after he didn't answer to their knock on the door. The sight that greeted them froze both experienced officers, neither had seen anything like this. The minister was conscious but being held in a full body bind while a dress wearing Lucius Malfoy was attempting to loosen the clearly terrified Fudge's robes. Two stunners blasted Malfoy into a wall before a finite released the minister.

Cornelius drew a deep, steadying breath before kicking Lucius Malfoy as hard as he could in the face. The two aurors were now physically restraining the struggling minister for magic as he attempted to repeat the feat on the unconscious body. Cornelius was ranting, raving and swearing at the top of his voice as he swung his foot and missed again. This also had the effect of quickly drawing a crowd.

It was only after Amelia entered that Cornelius regained some of his composure. "Amelia, I want that piece of filth leaking veritaserum from every pore. Everything this bastard has ever done I want down on parchment. Destroy him and arrest anyone else he names as a death eater. I was deluding myself these bastards could ever become upstanding members of our community. Bring them all down, anything you need is yours for the asking."

Amelia could have kissed Fudge, or at least let him have a few more kicks at Lucius. Her instructions were to destroy Malfoy, pictures of him in that dress on the front of the Prophet would do that job nicely. Saying that he attempted to assault the minister and got his nose broke for his troubles would also show Cornelius in a good light, Amelia was feeling particularly generous toward the minister at the moment. She immediately cancelled all auror leave and recalled all

off duty officers, the next twenty four hours would change their world forever.

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Harry was at Quidditch practice when a loud 'whoop!' from Hermione sitting in the stands caught his attention. Seeing her excitedly holding a letter that Hedwig had obviously just delivered had him flying over there like a bullet. The bollocking he was sure to receive from Oliver for abandoning practice and snogging his wife senseless would be well worth it.

The note had simply said, 'Enjoy your bacon sandwiches tomorrow while reading the Prophet, strangest house elf in the world seeks employment.' The enclosed advert for a tattoo parlour left no doubt that Sirius had accomplished his mission.

They would read about it tomorrow before getting the full story from Sirius first hand tomorrow night. The couple were unaware that there were other arrangements afoot tomorrow night, Emma Granger's 'operation Teddy' had its first phase revealed.

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It was later that night as the two professors were leaving the Potter's room that they had a chance to chat in private about their evening. "Well Minnie, what do you make of it?"

She didn't even have to think about her answer, "This could potentially be the biggest step forward for our community in living memory. What makes it all the more astonishing is that neither of them seem to be aware of what they've accomplished here. I can't help but smile when I see Miss Bulstrode sitting at the Gryffindor table, care to wager that the Potters will be the first to sit with their friends at the Slytherin table?"

Filius wasn't biting, "Oh I don't think you will get any takers for that bet. The news of them building another home in Australia was quite worrying though. They've been such a joy to teach I would hate to lose them."

"You and me both my friend. The impact they've had on Hogwarts has been huge, in such a short space of time too! Albus seems to think that would be an unmitigated disaster, I don't know his reasoning but I now tend to agree with that. We are witnessing something pretty amazing here, I don't know that it would continue if they left the country and I hope we don't have to find out the answer to that. Both Granger parents are closely monitoring the situation and Sirius will do whatever is necessary to protect the young couple."

Filius appeared to consider this for a moment before replying, "Things can't be allowed to return to the way they were, you know I've often wondered if the house system is divisive. The hat attaches labels to eleven year old children that follow them for the rest of their lives. I know I was a different person at sixteen than I was at eleven. I've long advocated dividing the students by yeargroup rather than houses. A junior, middle and upper house makes much more sense to me. That way we would get to know all the students over their seven years here, instead of just a quarter of them."

This was something that she and Filius had discussed on more than one occasion. "I can understand your argument Filius, but we would be losing the house cup and the Quidditch matches."

Filius had his answer prepared though, "Both of which are very divisive to the school. The Potters have shown us a vision of the future and that's the way I think we should be looking. Our current first year's are integrating, irrespective of houses or bloodlines, that is a future I have dreamed about for years. We've been granted a unique opportunity here to see how things could be, don't you prefer it?"

Her little friend's argument was more potent than at any other time because of what was happening in Hogwarts at the moment. "Of course I prefer it! What we need to ask though is should we discard a thousand years of history, because of something that may be nothing more than a passing fad?"

Filius was well aware the Potters were exposing the cracks in her argument, he pressed home his advantage. "A fad that would rid

future dark lords of their ability to so easily promote hatred and recruit gullible followers. Anything that turns the spotlight onto the bigotry and lies spouted by the purebloods is all good in my book. It can be no coincidence that the only first years against this are all Slytherin purebloods, they are wrong but nothing appears to be able to convince them of that. The phrase 'blind prejudice' springs to mind."

As they had now reached Minerva's quarters she bade her friend goodnight, there was much to think on.

Neither Professor noticed the headmaster melt from the shadows, he'd been listening to every word since they left the Potters. Another home in Australia for the Potters chilled him to the bone, forcing him to curtail any and all manipulations regarding them for now. The Potters had almost nonchalantly dealt with the Weasley boy this morning, Longbottom's altercation with the Malfoy heir had defanged little blond ponce. If Harry was half as good at Quidditch as Minerva alluded to, his popularity would be unstoppable. His master plan to keep the boy ignorant of the magical world had backfired spectacularly. Instead of being filled with wonder and awe, he and his wife were questioning everything. Worse still, they were encouraging others to do the same.

They just had two heads of house to tea. Another was so afraid of what they might say, he checked with the Potters before accepting the post. Given that the missing member went into raptures every time she spoke about how the first years were behaving like Hufflepuffs, Albus thought it was safe to assume the Potters had the full set of heads of house in their camp.

With even Hagrid thinking twice before proclaiming 'great man Dumbledore'. He felt his nightmare of becoming Albus Nobody was getting closer and closer all the time. He gave a little laugh that wasn't that far removed from a sob. Albus Dumbledore was reduced to sulking along the corridors while invisible, trying to discover what was happening in HIS school. These were changed days, changed days indeed!

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Back inside their room, a pair of Gryffindors were chuckling out loud. They watched as the dot labelled Dumbledore followed on behind the two professors that had just left their room. They'd noticed him on the map earlier, hanging around outside their door. They hoped either Minerva or Filius mentioned their new house going to be built in Australia. After all, that was why they brought the subject up. They needed to keep Albus off balance for at least another few weeks, that piece of news should put paid to any plans he had for them at the moment.

-oOoOo-

Molly loved her new clock, apart from Ronald's hand still pointing at mortal peril. After discussing this, they had decided it must be the fact that a Weasley was in Slytherin and the clock understood this wasn't right. With Ginny's clearly stating home, the twins pointing at school and everyone else indicating work, Molly was at least assured the rest of his family were all right.

A/N Thanks for reading

Ron's fate poll still running, thanks to all who took the time to vote.

Chapter 16

Sirius was eagerly awaiting his copy of this morning's Prophet, yesterday had felt so good and he was now looking forward to his blind date tonight. Instead of an owl though, Sirius found himself having to answer the door where all thoughts of his date swiftly flew away. Amelia Bones was standing there with a couple of aurors as back-up. Sirius had no other option but to invite them in, Dan and Emma greeted their visitors warily.

Amelia's tone alerted all three residents that this was not a social call. "Lord Black, can I ask you when was the last time you saw Lucius Malfoy?"

Sirius could answer with total honesty, "Madam Bones, I have not laid eyes on that blond arsewipe since before I was illegally placed in Azkaban. I also have no desire to break that run of good luck anytime soon. Could I ask what brought you here and why the question was asked?"

"We currently have Lucius Malfoy in custody, he claims you must have placed him under the Imperious curse yesterday. Can I ask you to give me an account of your movements up until about four o'clock yesterday?"

Sirius appeared unconcerned, "So he's resorting to the same excuse he used last time, I really thought he had more originality than that. I wonder if he has enough gold to escape Azkaban this time? I don't know what he's done but I intend to see that he doesn't. Yesterday I was in Gringotts for most of the afternoon conducting Black family business. I met briefly with Narcissa in that time which probably explains his claims. I'm revoking their marriage and claiming back the bride price since we all know her husband is a death eater. I also promised to cast her out the Black family the second the marriage is dissolved. I've already done the same to that psycho bitch Bellatrix. "

Amelia had to tread carefully, she didn't want to upset a man who the ministry had already treated badly. Something just didn't sit right with this case though. "Could the Narcissa that you met possibly have been Lucius under the influence of polyjuice potion?"

Sirius paused for a moment before answering, "It's possible, I haven't seen her for many years and would put any differences down to that. The meeting took place in a room in Gringotts though, that would be a hell of a risk to take. You do know what happens to people who try to deceive the goblins? She left well before I did, cursing my name because she would no longer have one. The papers dissolving her marriage should have cleared yesterday, allowing her to be cast out of the Black family today."

Amelia could understand that would be something the Malfoys would be desperate to avoid. Would they really concoct something this elaborate though? All Lucius had revealed about the incident was that he had set off to meet Sirius and the next thing he remembers is waking up in custody. Even under truth serum they couldn't get any more out of him, Amelia really didn't want to ask this next question but realised she must. "Lord Black, please may I check your wand?"

Sirius again took a moment before answering, "I can understand why you're asking madam Bones and can't help wishing you were in charge when I was dumped in Azkaban. I will allow you to check my wand in order to clear myself from this investigation."

Amelia accepted his wand gratefully, along with his reasoning. She was surprised to see the last six spells cast were all household spells and couldn't help but say so.

Both Grangers had kept quiet, realising that they were out of their depth here. Emma though, thought she could help with this. "That would be my fault, the whole family is moving to a new home next weekend and I was starting to panic about the work we still had to do. Sirius gave us a demonstration of how much easier it is to clean and pack when you can use magic. You've no idea how relieved I was after seeing that."

This got Amelia's attention, "Can I ask where you're moving to?"

Dan was getting fed up with these people turning up at his door whenever it suited them and didn't even try to hide his annoyance.

"Can I ask why you want that information? I was actually looking forward to a bit of peace and quiet."

Sirius not only backed him up, but let Lord Black out to play as he took his wand back from Amelia. "Last time I looked, supplying a forwarding address to the ministry was not an actual requirement when moving house. Madam Bones I have cooperated fully with your investigation, if there is nothing else then we'd like to have our breakfast without an auror guard."

Amelia was forced to put-up or shut-up, since she had nothing there was only one option open to her. "My apologies for disturbing your morning and I would like to thank you for your cooperation Lord Black. This closes the last avenue available for Lucius Malfoy to escape being punished. I think it's fair to say you won't be seeing him for quite a number of years yet. Please excuse my forwardness over your moving house, being inherently nosey is a requirement of my job. I just try to always be thorough."

Sirius relaxed his tone, "If you want to be thorough Amelia, I'll give you something that requires investigation. Barty Crouch brought his wife into the prison to visit their son, highly illegal and days later both mother and son were dead. The son was apparently in good health beforehand and of course there was no investigation. That's always smelled bad to me." He could see from Amelia's raised eyebrows that she thought it was highly coincidental as well. Sirius of course had been told that junior was currently living at home, hidden under an invisibility cloak while being guarded by a house elf. Sirius was determined to help the kids any way he could, getting rid of Crouch would definitely be a plus.

Amelia left the Grangers with more questions than she arrived with, not something she had anticipated when she knocked on their door. That the Potters were moving home was a concern but she had no right to demand their new address. She was sure she could soon discover it if she looked hard enough, unfortunately she was going to be very busy for the foreseeable future.

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The great hall was in turmoil at breakfast, and for once the Potters weren't at the centre of it. The two pictures on the front page of today's Prophet turned the spotlight directly onto Draco Malfoy. Lucius was there, pictured in all his finery. He was still in the dress and, while the aurors had removed the blood from his face, they had deliberately left the make-up on. Narcissa's picture was next to her husbands, she was charged with being an accessory to the assault on the minister. It was soon discovered that she, like her husband, was a death eater and the charges quickly began to multiply.

Draco sat there stoically as the jibes progressively got worse as his world fell apart.

"I'm confused Draco, which one's your mother?"

"That dress looks really sliming on your father."

"Do all three of you dress the same Draco?"

Just when he thought it couldn't get any worse, an owl from Gringotts arrived bearing bad news. The loud shriek from Pansy as she read it over his shoulder quietened the hall.

"If you're no longer Draco Malfoy, that means our betrothal is no longer valid!" She raced out of the hall in tears.

Millicent was as usual sitting beside Neville as she let out a sigh, "Sorry guys, but if I don't go and see if she's ok, no one else will. Quite a few Slytherins will have a lot more on their mind than Pansy's welfare. It now looks as if the ministry is actually going to start arresting death eaters."

Neville looked on in wonder as Millie went to check on a girl he knew she couldn't stand the sight of. It was Hermione who provided the answer he was looking for.

"She has a heart of gold Neville, we're very lucky to have her as a friend. If I tried to comfort Pansy, she would think I had come to gloat because we don't like Draco."

The words were out before Neville realised what he said, "Yeah, she is pretty amazing."

The Potters were pleased for Neville, they were dreading Halloween but at least they knew Neville would have other friends.

Feelings at the Slytherin table were running close to boiling point. The ministry had declared war on former death eaters due to the actions of one man. That many of them might soon be seeing family members on the front of subsequent Daily Prophets meant there was no sympathy for the blond boy whose turn it was today. Truth be told, there was quite a bit of animosity and anger toward the Malfoys. Draco was going to have a rougher time than even he thought.

Draco understood enough pureblood politics to know that if the head of the Black family had dissolved his parents' marriage, the next step would be to disown his mother. Since his father would appear bound for Azkaban, there would be no way for him to claim Draco as his heir. He would be Draco No-Name by Monday, and the blond Slytherin knew just who to blame for his massive downturn in fortune. Sirius Black had been freed from Azkaban due to Potter's actions, he was also his godfather. Draco had lost his name, heritage, both parents and his godfather since Potter came on the scene. His father was no longer in a position to order Draco not to antagonise precious Potter, he would show Weasley how a real Slytherin deals with his foes. That would have to wait, first thing on the agenda would be surviving the trouble that was coming his way. Then he could begin opening peoples' eyes so the blame could start to be appropriated where it belongs, before finding some allies for his revenge.

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Tonks thought she might be forced to cancel their date tonight but all the suspected death eaters came along quietly. Apart from extra guards for the holding cells, everyone's shifts should be back to normal by the weekend. She could only assume these people thought their money, power and position would protect them, the aurors were all aware that a trial under truth serum was their immediate future. None of them were stupid enough to tell them that though, at least not until they were safely ensconced in a holding cell.

She would have plenty of time to go home and get prepared for her date tonight, Tonks couldn't believe how nervous she was. How could she be looking forward to something yet dreading it at the same time.

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Sirius didn't have time to do his story justice, so Harry and Hermione were going to have to wait before hearing all the details. Needless to say it was a very happy Sirius who set out for his date.

Padfoot and Moony were sitting chatting while their dates were visiting the ladies room, Remus decided to ask his best friend straight out. "Sirius, why did you pull this stunt? I know the idea of you not being ready to date is ludicrous, so tell me the real reason!"

Sirius decided to be as honest as he could, "Remus, when we were younger, what's the first thing that would have gone through our minds if one of us was dating a metamorphmagus?"

Remus understood at once, "We would have thought they were a lucky bastard and imagined them having any woman they wanted. On tap, so to speak."

Sirius nodded his agreement, "The entire focus shifts though when the girl in question is a member of your family. I see how you look at Tonks and I know you'll never hurt her, I also think she might like you. All I'm doing is trying to help my best friend and a member of my family. If something happens between you then you know I approve. I happen to think you could be good for each other but this will be the limit of my involvement. I saw an opportunity for us all to have a nice night out and took it, nothing more sinister than that."

Remus was astonished at his friend's new-found maturity, maturity was not usually a trait one associated with Sirius Black. One question later though and he was reassured the maturity was only a temporary condition. "What do you think of your date?"

"Oh she's a babe! A babe who I'd really like to get to know better." A suggestive wiggle of his eyebrows left Remus in no doubt what the old dog meant.

The two girls meanwhile were having their own conversation in the ladies, "Well Hestia, what do you think of Sirius?"

Hestia was a couple of years older than Tonks but her sense of fun had seen the two become firm friends. When she'd agreed to this, it was supposed to be just her and Sirius. Watching Tonks with Remus, Hestia was beginning to wonder if her friend had played her. She decided to yank her chain a little, just to find out what was going on here. "Oh I like Sirius well enough but it's Remus who sets my heart all aflutter. Those gorgeous eyes of his look right into your soul when he speaks to you. I know Sirius is your relation but would you mind if we swapped for the rest of the evening? After all, it's not as if you're really dating the guy."

The way her friend's chin almost hit the floor told Hestia all she needed to know, "Ok, so when did you realise that you actually liked the guy?"

Tonks answered without thinking, "Wednesday! I helped him teach some kids at Hogwarts and found myself looking forward to it all day. He makes me feel like a nervous teenager again Hestia, what can I do about it?"

She laughed at her confused friend, "Tonks, you don't have to do anything. I was only half joking you know, he really is quite dishy."

Tonks actually growled back her answer, "Get your eyes off him Hestia, I saw him first!"

Sirius and Remus gazed on in wonder as the two beautiful witches returned to their table. Hestia was about the same height as Tonks though with a slightly fuller figure that Sirius definitely appreciated. Her shoulder length straight black hair perfectly framed her heart shaped face. It was her laughing blue eyes that Sirius thought was her most alluring feature, they seemed to sparkle when she smiled. They were sparkling now as she returned to her seat beside him.

Sirius decided then and there that his godson had a brilliant philosophy on life. When a Granger woman told you to do something, you just did it.

Emma's idea was paying all kinds of dividends Sirius hadn't expected, and the night was still young!

It had been a brilliant evening and the best first date Tonks could ever remember having. She was starting to get nervous though as Remus was taking her home. She was actively looking for her own flat but still staying with her parents at the moment. She was beginning to feel like a nervous teen again, what if Remus wanted to kiss her? What if he didn't?

She was so preoccupied that it almost made her jump when Remus placed his hands gently on her cheeks, adjusting her head slightly before tenderly kissing her lips.

"I hope you don't mind but I had been wanting to do that all evening, I was wondering if you wanted to do this again?"

Tonks still had her eyes closed as she answered him, "What, kiss or date?"

"Both!"

"Yes!"

Remus smiled as she still had her eyes closed, "Yes to what? Kiss or date?"

Her eyes now open, Tonks hands made their way to his cheeks. She gently said 'Both' before kissing Remus with rather more force than he'd used on her.

Somewhere deep in the back of her mind Tonks was thinking that feeling like a nervous teen was sometimes a very good thing indeed.

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Breakfast that Saturday morning was a loud, rambunctious affair as everyone caught up on the happenings since Tuesday. Hermione was jubilant that her mother's plan for getting Remus and Tonks to notice one another appeared to have gone so well. Emma was also grinning like the proverbial Cheshire cat but the clear winner in the smiles stakes was Sirius, he was beaming out enough sunshine to give them all a tan at breakfast. The marauder had just had a stellar few days.

Their breakfast was interrupted by the arrival of today's Prophet, the front page stopped all conversation.

"Well that was unexpected, brilliant but still unexpected."

Harry couldn't help but laugh at his godfather, "Sirius, you really do have a way with words. You've just single-handedly done more damage to Voldemort than any witch or wizard ever. And the beauty of it is, no one knows you were responsible for it!"

The front page of the Prophet looked like a chessboard, composed of tiny pictures of all the people the ministry had arrested under suspicion of being death eaters. Every single one was being put under trial with the use of truth serum now mandatory for anyone wearing a dark mark. Britain appeared to be finally dealing with its death eater problem. All present thought that ensuring Voldemort had no marked followers left walking the streets was a brilliant way to start the weekend.

The letter to Harry from Gringotts proclaiming his purchase of both Riddle and Gaunt properties was complete didn't dampen their mood either. With demolition scheduled for Monday, this added the icing to an already sweet day. The cherry on top however came from reading that the site had contained some contaminated material that had been safely disposed of, of course the correct sum had been withdrawn from his vault and they'd roasted a pig in his honour.

Harry was tempted to take Riddle out in their very next defence class, if he could think of a way to do it without arousing suspicion of their knowledge he probably would! Then his sensible side kicked in, he needed Tom to let the troll into the castle. All their demons would be

laid to rest on the one night, rather fitting that it would be Halloween. At one point Harry had considered adding Draco to the list, Sirius had solved that problem by leaving him without a name or power. Without the Malfoy millions to back him up, Draco No-Name became a nonentity in more ways than one.

Hermione was trying to imagine the effect this would have on Hogwarts, quite a few of the students had relatives featured on the front page. For the next few weeks it would be more important than ever to keep their large group of friends together. Millie had shown them that a kind word could make all the difference at a time like this.

For the first time since regaining their memories, Emma felt there was some hope for her family being able to live in the country they were born in. She had always assumed they would be heading off to Australia in November, never to return. It wasn't that she would have minded living down-under, it was very nice to have a choice though. Coming back to a country where her children might be murdered was never going to be an option.

The five at breakfast were again going to Devon for the day, seeing their new house in its final stages was getting them all excited. Sirius had been convinced to move into the self-contained flat above the garages, that way he could have as much privacy or company as he wanted.

Sirius wanted it to be his bachelor pad but everyone just referred to it as the kennel, much to his annoyance.

-oOoOo-

Quirenus Quirrell observed the expressions on the faces of the mainly Slytherin children who saw their relatives featured on the front page of the Prophet. Tom didn't feel anger or resentment, rather it was almost glee. These people had forsaken him, retreated behind their gold and relaxed in their manors while he barely existed.

A stay in Azkaban would let them feel a fraction of what he himself went through, they would also be exceedingly grateful when their lord eventually rescued them. He had no intention of doing so right away,

spending Christmas in a cell should turn them into the hardened followers he required.

They would come crawling back to their master from gratitude as well as fear. His new death eaters would be even more vicious against the people who dared to remove their privileged lifestyle. Combined with his, their wrath would be the stuff of legends.

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Harry could easily see where Hermione inherited her legendary organisational skills from, Emma was dashing throughout the house while taking copious notes and measurements to ensure everything fitted.

It was to this scene that Ginny and Luna entered, and immediately burst out laughing at the three males standing in a line and nodding in agreement to everything that Emma said.

Harry led both girls out to see the swimming pool, with a retractable roof and glass wall that opened to the garden, it could and would be used all year long. He needed a quiet word with their friends at the first opportunity, and this was it.

"Ginny, I didn't mind that you showed your brother Charlie the house but next week we move in here. That's when the wards will become active and only those invited will be able to access the house. You both are of course on the invited list but you'll have to floo or owl if you want to bring someone else along. These wards are to protect my family and they're the best the goblins offer, I would hate to see anyone run afoul of them by mistake."

Rather than having to deal with two upset girls, Harry found himself confronted by the both of them wearing wide grins. Luna explained their reaction to a clearly puzzled Harry. "These wards are to protect your family yet we can come and go as we please. That's rather a lot of trust your placing in us Harry."

Hermione arrived and saw the wide smiles, "Ah, I take it you told them about their room?" the gasps and squeals of delight as both

girls dived at Harry told a different story. "Well, maybe not." It was soon Hermione's turn to be engulfed by the two very happy girls, the quartet then made their way upstairs to inspect their respective rooms.

Emma and Dan were standing in what would soon be their bedroom, the large glass front had French doors that led onto their own balcony. It really was the house of their dreams, and sharing it with their daughter and son made it much more special. The house was designed to accommodate their eventual grandchildren as well, both parents knew they were years away from that yet but the news lately appeared to bring that reality just a bit closer.

Sirius effectively had his own apartment on the grounds, they could all be together until the bachelor decided to marry and raise a family of his own. The thought of the exact same house being built on the beautiful piece of land they bought in Coronet Bay made the dream even more complete. Their lives from now on could be composed of perpetual springs and summers. Neither Dan nor Emma had ever spent Christmas in the sunshine but both were more than willing to give it a try.

Sirius ran a glance over the spacious apartment and thought he certainly could be comfortable here. They all recognised this was merely the next stepping stone in his acclimatisation back into society. Staying with the Grangers had been incredibly good for him, Emma's gentle reminders that he no longer lived in a cell forced Sirius to remember his manners and how to interact with people again. It was Dan though who had helped the most, sitting in a pub while having a drink and a chat with a friend was something Sirius never thought he would do again.

Dan had a sort of inner peace that made him really easy to talk to, Sirius had unburdened his soul to his new friend / family. It's no wonder Harry and Dan were so tight, if ever there was a father figure for the lad to model himself on then Dan Granger was of the twenty four carat variety.

That's not to say this man was a push over, anything but! As they got to know one another, the shields had come down and Sirius saw the fire and steel under the mild mannered exterior. The night of

September the nineteenth they had touched on why they hated the Weasleys so much, Dan's reactions left Sirius glad he had black hair.

Sirius had later tried to put himself in Dan's place and wondered what it would take to get a reaction like that from him? The obvious answer left the man who had endured ten years in Azkaban feeling sick to his stomach and with fat tears running down his cheeks. His respect for these four sky-rocketed. To have that happen yet still try to help the people of Britain spoke volumes for their characters. Having to see that boy every day at Hogwarts must be driving them both nuts.

Sirius was beginning to understand their need to leave the country, Harry and Hermione would need time away to deal with everything that had happened to them. Sirius hoped it was no more than an extended holiday before they returned back to Britain, but he would support them no matter what they decided. With the ministry finally dealing with the country's death eater problem and the goblins roasting their last pig, prospects had seldom looked better for magical Britain.

Whether it could stand to lose its two brightest stars to Australia while still maintaining its reforms was another matter entirely.

Luna couldn't believe they had a bedroom in this fabulous house. It wasn't so much the actual room, more that it meant Harry and Hermione wanted them as part of their lives. For Luna Lovegood this was life changing. In such a short space of time she'd went from being a lonely girl to having her best friend live with her. Now she had another two friends who actually went out of their way to ensure she was included in their lives. This was a strange situation for Luna, wonderful but still strange. The little blond glanced toward Ginny and saw her friend displaying pretty much the same emotions she was, the Potters were having a huge influence on both their lives.

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Almost five hundred miles away in Hogwarts, Minerva McGonagall was sharing those views as she finalised the arrangements for the first year's visit to the ministry this Friday. She had suspected they may be forced to cancel due to events happening in their society at

the moment but the minister himself had been adamant that it would be business as usual. Minerva was sure she wouldn't be alone in expressing her shock that Cornelius had it in him, the entire electorate of magical Britain were probably thinking the same.

She also didn't think she would be alone in casting her vote for him at the next election, the green bowler hat went in the bin, as did listening to Albus and Malfoy. What emerged was a man who now believed in himself and didn't seem afraid to make the hard decisions, their society had been crying out for a strong leader for generations. That they had found one in the guise of Cornelius Fudge could be the most shocking revelation of all. Considering what life had been like lately, that was really saying something.

She would have Remus and Pomona accompany her and the students to the ministry. Filius would then lead the, as yet unannounced outing to Gringotts the following week. She couldn't remember a time when her job was so hectic, she also couldn't remember a time when she enjoyed her work more.

She would have to ensure they monitored the children of the arrested death eaters closely, that situation could not be allowed to fester and turn nasty. Minerva was delighted they now had Horace as head of Slytherin, his style of dealing with trouble was thankfully the total opposite of his confrontational predecessor. These children would remain in school at least until the summer, what happened after that was anyone's guess. A lot would depend on the sentences handed out, and the public's reaction to the trials.

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Cornelius Fudge also had the public's reactions at the forefront of his mind, that was until he saw transcripts of the first confessions coming through from those arrested. The crimes committed in the name of so called 'pureblood supremacy' were disgusting and depraved. These animals were nothing more than terrorists who decided to use any means while attempting to reach unobtainable goals.

Cornelius decided to 'cherry pick' which trials would be held in public, that would clearly demonstrate these people didn't deserve to be

walking the streets. They also decided to highlight that their actions had harmed purebloods just as much. Their society had suffered severe damage at the hands of these maniacs. Disagreeing with Voldemort had been a death sentence, irrespective of blood purity. Old pureblood families like the Potters, Bones, Longbottoms and Blacks to name but a few had almost been pushed to extinction.

His policy made in anger the other day could have come back to bite him on the arse, instead he was being lauded as a great leader who was not afraid to make the hard decisions. The thought of Malfoy in that dress sent shivers of revulsion through Cornelius as he realised he'd made a poor choice of metaphors. If the aurors hadn't grabbed him when they did, Malfoy would never have been able to bite anything ever again, Cornelius fully intended to kick the bastard's teeth right down his throat!

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Excitement in the Dursley household was running at fever pitch. Their letter had stood up to all the scrutiny they could throw at it, it was genuine and the Dursleys were finally upwardly mobile. Vernon was allowed his unpaid leave but would have to work his arse off until they left on Friday. This meant Petunia would have to handle all the shopping and packing while he was otherwise occupied at Grunnings.

Petunia could hardly contain her excitement, her time now would be taken up by shopping for new clothes before undertaking the trip of a lifetime. The only miniscule cloud on the horizon was that leaving on Friday didn't give her enough opportunities to boast about it to her friends. This was balanced by the anticipation of all the stories she would be able to recount when she returned.

-oOoOo-

Draco's prediction proved to be accurate, he was now Draco No-Name. That in their culture placed him one rung on the ladder above a squib. Just when he thought his standing in Slytherin couldn't get any lower, the Malfoy name turned to shit before he lost even that.

His attempts to push the blame onto Potter were met mostly with derision. Crabbe and Goyle stayed because their fathers were both on the front page of the Prophet, Weasley stayed because he had nowhere else to go.

Pansy was so upset over their betrothal no longer being valid that she was of little use to him at the moment. Neither she nor Draco harboured any illusions that Pansy's father was doing anything other than diligently searching for a suitable match for his daughter. With neither fame nor money, Draco certainly wouldn't make the list.

All Draco had left was a chance at vengeance, unlike Weasley though he certainly didn't want an audience when he made his move. The fewer people who knew about it, the better.

Jason Burke was a third year who had appeared sympathetic to Draco's arguments. Like a good Slytherin though, he didn't want to call attention to himself by taking a stand against the general opinion. Jason's family had been decimated by the arrests and he, like Draco, was looking for someone to vent on.

Draco had training in spells way beyond first year levels from his father. Crabbe and Goyle were never going to be anyone's first choices for back-up in a magical fight. Weasley's mouth continually made claims his magic couldn't cover. Draco needed the assistance of Jason for the initial attack. A well-executed ambush should disarm the Potters, then Vin and Greg came into their own.

Without wands the Potters would soon rue the day they messed with Draco, his two companions with beater bats in their hands would soon see to that. Of course when their beaten and broken bodies were found, Draco would be nowhere near that location with a cast iron alibi to boot. That was how a Slytherin operated, his father had trained him well.

A/N Thanks for reading

My next post will be Chapter 2 of Souls Abound.

Chapter 17

Excitement was bubbling under the surface of everything the first years' did at Hogwarts this week, even those like Susan Bones who'd visited there many times before were looking forward to showing their friends around the ministry. The positions were now reversed as the muggle borns were trying to discover what they could expect to see on Friday.

Millie was packing her stuff and getting ready to leave Charms when Pansy whispered that she'd like a private word. They headed off down the corridor before slipping into an empty classroom.

Millie didn't want to waste any time, "What's the problem Pansy?"

Pansy was wringing her hands from nerves, "I need you to do something for me. Draco is about to make a very big mistake and I need your help in stopping him."

Millie appeared confused, "What can I do?"

The nervous Slytherin took a deep breath before replying, "You can tell the Potters of his plans to attack them."

This really flummoxed Millie, she couldn't figure what Pansy was up to. "Why would you want me to do that?"

Pansy tried to explain to her fellow Slytherin. "My father was in the court public gallery the day Sirius Black was freed. He maintains Harry Potter played the entire room for fools before stitching up the minister in front of the press on his way out. He has warned me not to cross the Potters on any account, if Harry wasn't already married my father would have a betrothal contract with my name on it sent to him. My father is a very hard man to impress but Harry Potter managed it."

Millie was now more confused than ever, "I'm sorry Pansy, if you think Harry is going to leave Hermione under any condition then you're delusional."

Pansy rolled her eyes, "It's nothing like that, it's Draco I'm worried about. They plan a surprise ambush on them. Should they be successful and harm Hermione in any way, what do you think Harry would do?"

Millie now understood, "I think we both have a very good idea what Harry would do, Draco wouldn't stand a chance."

"Exactly, the attack would probably fail anyway. If they know it's coming, it should lessen the chances of anyone getting hurt. They plan to ambush them as they make their way back from Quidditch practice on Thursday night.

Millie could see the sense in that plan, it might even stand a chance of working, if it wasn't against Harry and Hermione Potter. "I'll let them know Pansy, I also stand by what I said, you're far too good for Draco Malfoy. Once you start hanging around with some real friends, you might realise that."

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Their extra defence lesson that week was fantastic. The atmosphere between Tonks and Remus was bursting with fun and mischief. This carried over to the first year duels, with Tonks acting almost as a cheerleader and Remus providing hilarious commentary, learning had never been so much fun. Harry of course won the impromptu tournament by virtue of no one being able to hit him with a spell.

Remus then challenged him under the same rules and faired no better. Harry's movements transcended fluidity and he appeared to anticipate where the spells were aimed before they were even cast. A sneaky Tonks attempted to help her new boyfriend by firing a stinging hex from behind him, only to find it blocked by Hermione. This started a duel between the two witches, still sticking to the same rules and laughing at each other's attempts.

Harry managed to slip a jelly-legs through his opponent's defences, only for Remus to cast a finite.

"Hey, not on the allowed list, that's cheating!"

Remus was enjoying himself immensely, "I'm a marauder, of course I'm cheating!"

Harry was also having a good time, normal lessons had been less than challenging for both of them. Here was a chance to have fun without giving away their abilities so both he and Hermione were entering into the spirit of the duel. "Well I'm the son of the marauder's leader so I know a fair bit about cheating myself."

Harry spun away from his opponent's latest spell and cast a stinging hex at Tonks' backside, her surprised yelp froze Remus for an instant. That was enough for Hermione to hit the marauder with a stinging hex, signifying the end of the duel.

The cheering from their year mates reverberated around the castle, two first years had taken down an auror and the Hogwarts security advisor. All be it a limited spell duel but it was still a victory.

Tonks was still laughing though, "Hey Remus, why are we teaching these two again?"

"I don't know, I do know I was winning my duel until you interfered!" this led to another stinging hex hitting Remus and a quick apology to his girlfriend from the marauder. Much to the added amusement of everyone there.

The students left the class in tremendous spirits, raving about the real or imagined moves they'd pulled during the tournament. With the promise of learning more spells and then more duelling next week, this was quickly becoming their favourite class in Hogwarts. They all agreed that this was how defence should be taught, not a stutter or turban to be found anywhere!

The kids had barely left the classroom when Tonks sprang into her boyfriend's arms. Remus was gradually becoming acquainted with all the women who went into his girlfriend's make-up. He wasn't talking about the physical changes she could do, more the different personalities her condition appeared to demand.

This was 'playful Tonks' and probably her most used persona. When he tried to have a serious talk with her over his condition, 'auror Tonks' appeared and told him in no uncertain terms that she could handle it. Her exact words still made Remus chuckle, "Listen wolfie, I take down bad guys for a living. Compared to some of them, you're a pussycat!"

The gauntlet had been thrown down, she was an auror who was trained to handle the worst their world could throw at her. If Remus pursued this matter, he would be questioning her abilities on a personal and professional level. He had made some arrangements so she could see him when transformed, if she was ok with that then maybe they had a chance of being a couple.

If she wasn't then Remus for one wouldn't blame her, it was a lot to ask of anyone. The marauder tried not to think too much about that outcome, in a very short space of time this witch had breached defences he'd spent years refining. If she couldn't handle it he would understand, that didn't mean he wouldn't be heartbroken.

Tonks found herself falling harder for Remus every time they met, she understood his concerns but just didn't see it as a problem. So they had to arrange their lives around the lunar calendar? She was prepared to accept he was an animal once a month to get the sweet guy she really liked the other twenty-seven days.

Having dated her fair share of arseholes, her new boyfriend's good points far outweighed the monster he saw himself as. How anyone so kind, gentle and fun could consider themselves a monster was beyond Tonks' understanding.

It was obvious even just from tonight that Remus was a gifted teacher, engaging the children to the lesson was no easy task. His sense of fun kept the lesson light but at no time was his control of the lesson anything less than total. His quips of commentary during the duels were hilarious and had everyone in stitches, his students were learning while enjoying themselves. Tonks couldn't think of a higher accolade for a teacher than that.

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Thursday was over in a flash as the much anticipated visit to the ministry was now almost upon them. Harry and Hermione took their usual route back to their room from Quidditch practice. Harry preferred his own shower, or perhaps the company, so they always left to walk back themselves while the rest of the team used the changing room's facilities. They were in the middle of a corridor when two disarming spells shot out of a darkened alcove and left them both without a wand.

Draco swaggered out from the shadows, flanked by his Slytherin posse of Crabbe, Goyle, Weasley and some older boy who was unknown to them. "Not so clever now, are we? You messed with the wrong people and now it's time to pay, let's see how well you do without your wands. Crabbe and Goyle here also need some Quidditch practice but seem to have brought their bats and no bludgers. Too bad, for you two that is!"

Greg and Vin ambled forward, smacking their bats off their free palms while the other three covered them with their wands. All eyes were on them so no one noticed the cat who'd quietly observed the entire episode, that was until the cat transformed into Minerva McGonagall.

"I think I've seen all I need to here, I'll take those bats gentlemen."

Minerva cast a summoning charm at the bats and couldn't believe what happened next. The bats easily jumped out both boy's hands but they had them secured to their wrists by a strap, this appeared to really interfere with the deputy headmistress's spell.

The bats swung back and hit both the large Slytherins squarely on the jaw, this saw them stagger backward and swing their arms in an attempt to maintain their balance. Swinging your arms with a heavy bat still attached to your wrist can be dangerous, especially in an enclosed space like a corridor. Jason was just beginning to think he'd made a major mistake in listening to Draco when Crabbe's beater bat hit him on the temple and he wasn't thinking about anything else for a while. Goyle's caught Draco also in the face with enough force to break his nose for the second time in his short Hogwarts career. The

wrist straps though weren't built to take these types of stresses and strains, both snapped and spun away apparently out of control.

Harry though, appeared to have perfected the prat seeking missile wandless spell as both bats homed in on their target. Ronald Weasley didn't even have time to think 'not again' before both bats impacted hard enough to make a portrait's eyes water. The pain from his groin was beyond description, Ron swayed about like a cheap self-assembly wardrobe before joining his fellow Slytherins crumpled and crying on the floor.

Minerva was gazing at her wand as if she'd never seen that particular piece of wood before, her summoning charm had felled five students in as many seconds.

The Slytherin groans and moans were interrupted by Harry, "Wow Professor McGonagall! You have to teach us that spell. We thought Remus and Tonks were great at defence but that was in a league of its own."

Hermione was struggling to contain her laughter at Harry's praise, knowing full well her husband had orchestrated the entire thing using his wandless magic.

Minerva was at a loss to explain what had just happened, neither Potter currently had a wand and she severely doubted if the Slytherins had done it to themselves. She was delighted that the Potter's trusted her with this task tonight. Minerva never asked how they came upon the information, she just assumed one of their friends in Slytherin had forewarned them.

Draco was lying dazed on the floor with blood once again pouring out his broken nose. He kept wondering what went wrong with his perfect plan and why was it always his nose that got hit?

"Mr and Mrs Potter, could you please make your way back to your quarters. I shall clean up here."

Harry bent down to recover their wands and managed to break Draco's with his foot at the same time. That the wand was still in

Draco's hand and Harry heard more than one crack helped to make his night. The general noise emanating from the other four Slytherins drowned out Draco's new cries while McGonagall was speaking with a house elf about warning Madam Pomfrey and getting some assistance in moving these students to the infirmary.

Harry and Hermione managed to make it back to their quarters before collapsing into each other's arms and howling with laughter. Hermione wasn't sure what was the funniest, McGonagall's expression as her spell went awry or the five Slytherins getting their comeuppance. It was close but the sight of Ronald in pain was always going to get her vote.

They had laughed themselves silly before Charles knock signified there was someone at their door, they managed to pull themselves together before going to see who was calling.

Neville and Millie were waiting patiently outside their door, the rumour mill was already in high gear as five Slytherins were spotted being levitated toward the infirmary. Hermione invited them in and had barely got the door shut when Millie could contain herself no longer.

"What happened? There's rumours flying around of a massacre, didn't McGonagall appear on time?"

Hermione was trying to tell the story with a straight face but the image of a bewildered McGonagall kept threatening to crack her up. "Yes, the professor was there in her cat form. She heard everything and appeared the instant we were in any danger. She cast a summoning charm on the gruesome twosome's beater bats but apparently Draco didn't trust them not to lose the bats on their way to the ambush. The bats were tied to their wrists and swung back against the spell, smacking them in the face before they battered into each other in a comedy of errors. It was hysterical!"

Harry was now laughing along with his wife, "You could just tell Draco was desperate to say 'wait until my father hears about this'. Not being able to probably hurt him more than getting smacked in the face by Goyle's beater bat. I know it's wrong to laugh at other people's misfortune but after what Draco had planned tonight, he got off lightly.

Tell Pansy thanks from us Millie and explain what happened. Had we not been expecting it, there's no way those spells would have hit. Madam Pomfrey would currently be trying to remove the bat I stuffed down Malfoy's throat!"

"I'll tell her Harry, she'll understand. Do you think they'll be expelled?"

"I doubt it will go that far but you can bet McGonagall will punish them. We went to her for help, if she doesn't deal with them then people will start taking care of their problems by themselves."

Neville glanced at his watch, "Millie, we need to get you back to your house before curfew. The prefect rounds will be extra vigilant tonight, we'll see you guys for breakfast and then we're off to the ministry."

With them gone, Harry headed for his much needed shower.

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Minerva was listening to Poppy give her report while running punishments through her head, that none of these first years would now be going to the ministry tomorrow was a given. Letters home wouldn't do much good since Crabbe and Goyle were the only ones with a parent still at home. She was considering Weasley when Poppy mentioned his name.

"Minerva, I'm seriously concerned about that boy, since term started he's had three injuries of increasing severity to his groin. His body is hardly getting time to heal and he didn't have a lot of magical reserve in the first place. Between the attack on Miss Granger, the accident with the broom and his participation tonight, I don't think the lad could sustain another hit to that spot in the near future without losing his ability to reproduce. I'm going to insist he wears a protective cup but his parents should be informed of this development in case they want to withdraw him from Hogwarts. Malfoy is in much the same position with his nose, a squinty snout though is hardly as serious a condition."

Minerva was aware Poppy didn't raise issues like this unless they were serious, a pureblood being unable to reproduce due to injuries

he received in Hogwarts was very serious. "Very well Poppy, I'll write that letter. Spending all their free time between now and Halloween in detention might keep them out of trouble."

Minerva would write to Charlie Weasley tonight, she didn't think he would withdraw his youngest brother as there was no where else for him to go.

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At the ministry next morning, everything was ready for the first visit from Hogwarts. Amelia had actually sent two of her aurors on a public tour of the muggle houses of parliament as a fact finding mission. She had also ensured that one of them was a pureblood so she could have two different sets of opinions. Amelia was actually pleasantly surprised when both returned with praise for the guided tour and some fresh ideas that they had implemented for today. She'd run them passed Cornelius and he'd loved them. When did she start thinking of him as Cornelius?

They had suspended the trials for today as a trip to the Wizengamot chamber was always planed as being one of the highlights of their day. It wouldn't do for a visiting student to see a relative on trial, they had cooked-up something special though that she was sure they would like.

The trials would be completed next week, the Wizengamot had taken the unusual step of waiting until they had heard all the trials before passing sentences. Amelia assumed they were trying to assess the magnitude of the problem before committing themselves to a specific course of action. She hoped they weren't just trying to gauge public opinion before putting these people away for a very long time. Having been involved in most of the trials and reading the transcripts of those she wasn't, she would personally have ordered up a dementor's feast. A nice open air picnic in Azkaban with death eaters on the menu, these animals deserved nothing better. She was drawn out of her musing as the students started tumbling out of the fireplaces, it was showtime.

Remus was getting worried, he saw the kids begin to lose interest as they were shown around another department and given essentially the same lecture on how important this department was by someone who worked in it. Tonks had hinted they had something special lined up but he was beginning to suspect she meant lunch.

Finally they made their way to the auror department, unfortunately and disappointingly to be met with the same format as every other department. Suddenly four men burst into the department and started firing curses at those giving the talk, Tonks went down to a curse and then all hell broke loose. Remus and Pomona immediately raised shields to protect the children while Minerva was transfiguring everything she could lay a spell on into walls for the children to hide behind. Harry and Hermione though didn't hesitate, the person who hit Tonks went down to two stunners as they then turned their attention to the other three. Seeing this, their year mates soon had their wands out and stinging curses were raining down on the attacking wizards. Two of them were on the floor while the final one hid behind a desk before Amelia managed to yell for everyone to stop. She couldn't help but noticed the other children looked to the Potters to see if they should comply, that they had stopped firing but still had their wands drawn set the benchmark for the rest of them to follow suit.

Amelia was left shaking her head, their big plan for a simulated attack on the auror department was supposed to throw some excitement into their day had certainly met that objective. They were then going to prosecute the 'criminals' this afternoon in the Wizengamot chamber with the children playing parts in the trial.

It had been a good idea but apparently a shit plan for a number of reasons. In their wisdom they had went for realism and complete surprise to their visitors, unfortunately they had forgotten to take account of their visitors reactions to the attack. Remus was currently standing over Tonks in a very protective stance and his wand threatening anyone who even looked in their direction. Harry and Hermione Potter's wands also continually scanned the room searching for threats. When three aurors burst into the room and were met with a volley of stinging curses, Amelia knew it had gotten

out of hand. In the space of twenty seconds their plan had turned into waste parchment.

McGonagall wanted answers, and wanted them now. "Madam Bones, what in the name of Merlin is going on here? I thought my students would at least be safe in the auror department!"

Amelia held her hands up to take the blame, "My apologies for not running this past you beforehand, in our defence I would say that we have had quite the last few weeks. The idea was to provide some excitement in a controlled environment, I should have realised that when we introduced your group into the environment then we no longer had control. Your students are to be commended for their swift and courageous actions here today. Far too often my aurors are left to fight alone, despite the presence of a public who all carry wands. They must have a really good defence professor?"

This praise cooled Minerva's temper by a few degrees, she was also very impressed with her student's behaviour. She didn't want Quirrell taking the credit though, "I think that may have been one of your problems, it would appear your fake attack was against one of their favourite teachers."

The auror who had taken shelter behind the desk slowly put his head over it, waving his wand with a white hankie tied to it above his head. This broke the remaining tension and got some laughs from the students.

Amelia then noticed quite a few of them made straight for Tonks to see how she was as Remus helped his girlfriend to her feet. Remus was anxious that she was going to give him pelters for being overprotective, instead, she hugged the relieved marauder and whispered 'thanks' in his ear.

The revived 'criminals' were being given a bit of a good natured ribbing from their fellow aurors about being taken out by a bunch of kids. When they pointed out that one of those 'kids' was Harry Potter, the ribbing stopped immediately.

As the kids began to realise what had happened, one or two of them began to worry that they had fired on aurors, they soon calmed down when Madam Bones started walking among them and shaking their hands for acting so decisively. They were going down to the duelling area where a more organised display of duelling awaited them.

Amelia made it a point to talk to the Potters, "I would like to thank you both for protecting my auror there."

Hermione corrected her assumption, "We were protecting our friend Madam Bones, who just happens to be one of your aurors."

Amelia also had it confirmed from Susan that Tonks and Remus had been giving them all extra defence lessons, Harry had asked and they'd both said yes. Her niece's opinion of the man whose job that supposedly was did not flatter the professor in the slightest.

Amelia though was very interested to hear that Harry had won the impromptu duelling contest before he and his wife had gotten the better of their teachers. This, combined with the times she had seen him in action gave the head of the DMLE an idea. She just hoped it played out better than her other one had today.

After watching some very impressive duelling from the aurors, Amelia stood to announce lunch was about to be served. This was her moment to discover if the Potter boy was as able as she thought. "We shall very shortly be going to lunch but it has come to my attention that you recently practiced a very limited form of duelling. I was wondering if anyone wanted to give it a try using the same rules?"

Almost at once all the children began chanting, "Harry, Harry, Harry..."

Amelia casually glanced toward the boy, Harry could see at once he was being manipulated into this but that didn't mean he couldn't have some fun of his own. He stood to much cheering before holding his hands up for silence, "I would be delighted to duel the head of the DMLE for practice, are you ready to lose in your own back yard Madam Bones?"

Harry was playing it for laughs but Amelia knew she was effectively trapped into duelling the boy. She'd been trying to think who to match him against when he'd seen right through her ploy and came up with one of his own, she'd underestimated him again. "Very well Mr Potter, stinging hexes and jelly-legs only?"

Harry nodded as they squared off. Amelia intended to put him through his paces so would start off rather easy and build up her rate of spells. The boy moved like quicksilver though and she couldn't lay a spell on him, it was getting embarrassing with all the aurors watching while the kids cheered like mad for their friend. She was now firing as rapidly as she could but Amelia was still unable to pin him down, the little bugger was so quick and agile.

A spell passed her well wide and she was just beginning to think he must be tiring when a stinging curse impossibly hit her on the arse, she glanced behind her to see Hermione with a shield up and the children going absolutely nuts in celebration. The sneaky little bastard had bounced a spell off his wife's shield to win the duel, Amelia couldn't help herself, she bust out laughing at their ingenuity. She walked forward to congratulate Harry, only to find his wife had gotten there to hug him first. Amelia shook his hand before asking the expected question. "Congratulations Mr Potter! If you don't mind me asking, how did you learn to move like that?"

Harry's brow furrowed as he answered her, "My obese cousin and his friends used to play a game they called 'Harry hunting'. If I was caught, they used to beat the shit out of me. That's one hell of an incentive for learning to dodge."

Hermione added her own opinion to the situation, "That's why he won't ever stay there again and our lawyers are preparing a water tight case against the person who abandoned him there."

It was a shocked Amelia who could only nod at this. Every time she thought she discovered something about these two, it was not only explained away but left Amelia thinking that she had somehow failed them. Failing someone was not something Amelia Bones was used to.

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During lunch, Amelia closely observed as the children interacted with each other. They may look toward the Potters for leadership but couldn't help noticing neither of the Potters expected it. Harry had taken down at least one auror with a stunner and then got the better of her in a duel. Any other boy would be lording it over their peers and swaggering around so everyone could see them, Harry Potter did neither. He and his wife sat with Neville Longbottom, the Bulstrode girl and even stranger, Pansy Parkinson stopped to chat. The whole situation appeared fluid though as the kids moved about talking to their friends.

Amelia was caught watching the students by Minerva, "Amazing, isn't it? What's even more amazing though is the same thing happens in Hogwarts. Houses and blood status plays no part in this, they talk to each other because they're friends and these old eyes never get tired of watching it."

Amelia could only agree with those sentiments, "The Potters really are something else."

"They question everything Amelia, the answer of 'that's the way it's always been' is never accepted. Not only that but you must have noticed the others follow their lead. We're looking at the future hope for our society and I don't think I've felt this optimistic in decades."

Again Amelia could only agree, "Susan speaks very highly of both Potters in her letters home, she's a very quiet girl and I was afraid she would disappear into Hufflepuff and never be heard from again. Instead, she is loving her time at Hogwarts and seeing her standing there today firing off stinging hexes at an attacker made me prouder than I can say."

"I know what you mean and would love to take credit for it but I can't, Harry saw how useless the defence professor was and took steps to ensure they all learned the subject. Everyone else, including me accepted the situation but not them. They could easily forge ahead in all their classes, instead they help everyone around them and are helping create an exceptional year. Harry and Hermione are exceptional students who have the ability to look at things differently

and not afraid to ask for help to get what they need. We both know today wouldn't have happened if the Potters didn't first think of it and then do something about it."

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Brian Davis had heard the rumours circulating the ministry, if it were anyone else but Harry Potter he would have discounted them as nonsense. Where that lad was concerned, anything was possible. He was spotted by Tracy who had asked her friends to meet her father.

"I'm delighted to finally meet you Lord Potter. I would ask that you allow me to pay our family's life debt for saving my daughter's life?"

Harry shook the man's offered hand as he replied, "Sir, Tracy gave us her friendship so what more could we want? There are no debts between friends."

Brian could see for himself the sincerity in the lad and was exceedingly happy with her choice of friends. As a member of the Wizengamot he'd listened all week what the blood purists had done in an attempt to chase an impossible dream. The Potter's appeared to have an entirely different dream as well as a whole new approach to accomplishing it. Brian Davis decided there and then to do whatever he could to help them, some dreams were worth fighting for.

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After all the excitement before lunch, the danger of this part of the tour falling flat was massive. Instead, the importance and history of what transpired inside this chamber kept everyone enthralled. The role playing side of things was a lot of fun for the adults as well, it was refreshing to hear honest opinions without other agendas driving policy.

The minister made his expected appearance though without the usual press contingent in tow. He sat in his chair of office and just chatted with the children, Minerva found herself falling into the same trap as Amelia and thinking of him as Cornelius. He was certainly a big hit with her students.

After answering a few questions, Hermione asked one that had his advisors about to intervene before the minister held his hand up to stop them and the chamber held its collective breath.

"Minister, what do you think the chances are of a muggle born witch or wizard ever sitting in that chair?"

"Mrs Potter, I hope that's not a comment on how well I'm doing my job?" this raised quite a few laughs before Cornelius answered her question. "The most honest answer I can give you is 'I don't know', our society is changing and we just don't know at the moment what's around the corner. I know that's not what you wanted to hear so I'll give you my best guess. It will happen some day, by your generation? probably not. By your children's generation? possibly. By your grandchildren's generation? definitely! We can no longer live in the past, I have observed how you and your classmates have interacted today and can honestly say that is the future I desire for everyone. I can only hope none of you are in a hurry to throw an old man out of his job."

This was met with some laughter but also some applause.

Hermione wore a genuine smile, "Minister, that was exactly the answer I was looking for. You didn't know something and said so before giving us your best guess. Although my husband and I are considered adults in most things, we're not yet allowed to vote. That's a pity though as we can assure everyone we would have been voting for Cornelius Fudge."

The applause that followed actually had Fudge blushing, that endorsement had probably won him the next election. Receiving praise for telling the truth was not something politicians were used too, perhaps he could start a new trend?

When Harry stood, the entire chamber waited expectantly on what he was going to say, you would have gotten long odds on his announcement though. "Minister, on behalf of our classmates I would like to thank everyone involved in making this a special day for us and only hope it can become an annual event for the new students of

Hogwarts. My letter to you regarding this visit met with such a positive response that I decided to ask the same of Gringotts bank. I am delighted to say that they are as forward thinking as you and have made arrangements for the same group to visit them next Friday. None of this would be possible without your leadership, a leadership that played a major part in my wife and I choosing to stay in Britain. Thank you sir."

Harry sat to silence as the enormity of Hogwarts visiting Gringotts began to sink in to those present. Brian Davis had watched the entire thing very carefully and was now certain the minister was wrong, should Mrs Potter ever run for minister she would win by a landslide. Watching them both was an education, they complemented each other perfectly and were already a political force to be reckoned with. Their incredible achievement with the goblins saw Brian stand and break the silence by beginning the applause which soon became thunderous.

Peter Parkinson was also on his feet, his only regret being the lad was already married. He would have made a perfect husband for Pansy and a brilliant addition to his family. He would have to say though that they looked well matched and their moves were worthy of any Slytherin, who would dare object to Hogwarts visiting the goblins now.

Amelia immediately turned to Minerva, "Of course you knew but how did you pull it off?"

Minerva just smiled and told the truth, "It's exactly like Harry said, he asked and they agreed. Sometimes the simple answers are the truth. Who amongst us even thought about arranging something like today? Harry's simple argument to the goblins was they would have experienced the muggle and magical worlds, shouldn't the goblins be next? Before he's finished Hogwarts I predict gillyweed and a visit to the mervillage. Trouble is, when you're dealing with the Potters, no one will bet against anything happening."

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Albus had avoided the great hall last evening, he didn't want to see all the smiling faces that would remind him his presence was actually blocked from being part of their tour. He had thought the children seeing him as Chief Mugwump might have restored some of the respect he had lost. Cornelius had forcibly reminded him that he was currently suspended before dropping the bombshell. The ministry were working with the Potter lawyers as they felt it was in everyone's best interests to discover why a baby was left on a muggle doorstep. How could they say it was in everyone's best interests? It certainly wasn't in Albus Dumbledore's best interests!

It was a rather grumpy Albus who made his way to breakfast, his mood was certainly not improved by the Daily Prophet. The editorial was full of praise on the history being made by Hogwarts, both with yesterday's visit to the ministry and next week's visit to Gringotts.

The problems Albus had were twofold, his name wasn't mentioned anywhere and it really showed just how far out of the loop he was when the Prophet knew more about the happenings inside Hogwarts than he did.

His ambition to gain influence with the Potters was looking more hopeless with every passing day.

A/N Thanks for reading.

Chapter 18

Charlie felt unable to make the decision about Ron and Hogwarts so forwarded the problem to Cairo, Arthur Weasley predictably hit the roof.

"What in the name of Merlin was Ron doing attacking the Potters, in the company of the Malfoy boy no less. I knew when Charlie told us that's who he was hanging about with there would be trouble."

Molly wisely let her husband rant himself out before she spoke, "What do you think we should do about this? Will Ron be safe there?"

Arthur was still mad though, "Not if he deliberately disobeys me again and goes after the Potters. Had they harmed that girl in any way, Lord Potter would have demanded vengeance, and got it. They would at the very least been expelled, with their wands snapped and magic bound. We all know he would have done it in a second if they'd harmed his wife. As if we don't have enough trouble with Percy still missing, Ron has to go and pull a stunt like this. I never thought I would see the day when the twins would be the sensible ones in this family."

Bill was also very angry but for a very different reason, "I never thought I would see the day when a brother of mine would be prepared to stand back and watch a young girl get hit by beater bats. Are you sure he's not adopted? Hanging out with Malfoy and now pulling this shit! If Charlie hadn't burned our bridges with Muriel, I'd say send him there. They deserve one another."

Molly being the calm one was also something never seen before, "That doesn't help us decide what to do next."

Arthur took a couple of calming breaths, this was not a decision to be made in anger. "Ok, let's look at this logically. He can't stay with the Lovegoods, the girls currently share the only other bedroom and there's no one there to home school him. Britain is Hogwarts or nothing. Charlie can't take a child onto a dragon reserve so the only other option is here. We eat, sleep and work with not enough hours in the day to get done what we need, where have any of us got the time

to teach Ron anything. He would end up spending his days fetching and carrying while we try to make a go of this place."

Neither Molly nor Bill could argue with any of that.

"I still see Hogwarts as his only option. Minerva has him in detention until Halloween, let's wait until then and see if it controls his temper. Perhaps we could get him here for the Christmas holidays and introduce him to some hard work. Two weeks helping out here will have him desperate to return to Hogwarts and stay out of trouble."

Molly just kept glancing at her new clock that had no hand for Percy and Ron's still pointing at Mortal Peril. The logic behind her husband's thinking was crystal clear and bringing Ron here for the Christmas holidays might just be the kick up the arse her youngest son needed to get him back on the straight and narrow. They would just have to pray the safety measures the school had taken would be effective and Ron stayed out of trouble until then. The family didn't really have another option at the moment and Christmas wasn't that too far away.

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When Harry and Hermione arrived in Crawley, they found total disarray and mum appeared ready for a good cry. Moving home is regarded as one of the most stressful things you can do in life, Emma's emotions were already all over the place as good memories of raising Hermione here had surfaced all day. This was totally irrational as she adored her new home but a part of her would always miss this place.

Hermione sprang into her mother's arms while Harry surveyed the scene. "Ok, I'll phone the restaurant and get a booking for seven. That should give everyone time to get ready for dinner and we'll leave from there to our new home."

Emma glared at her son as if he'd just stepped off a spaceship and was unaware of how things worked in this world. "And who, pray tell, is going to do all the work while we're enjoying some wonderful pasta?"

Harry's smile melted her heart but his words made her laugh. In a deep voice, Harry began the well known introduction.

"If you have a problem..."

A smiling Hermione joined in with her husband, "If no one else can help you..."

Dan was now laughing as well, remembering the times in Australia when they'd watched re-runs of the show. Laughing and joking that perhaps they should have contacted them to deal with Voldemort. He joined in the chant. "And if you can find them..."

Emma's mood had done a polar shift, here were her two kids laughing and joking. That's what made a home, not bricks and mortar. She to joined in for the punch line. "Maybe you can hire the A-Team!"

Sirius was now giving all four of them the alien spaceman look. He was forced to admit though, whatever stunt the kids had pulled had been bloody effective. Only moments before Emma had been freaking out.

As the laughter died down, Harry made his announcement. "Ok everyone, we're going to have a new addition to our family! The adults' complexions were changing colours to ones not found in any rainbow and Dan was actually swaying on his feet. Hermione meanwhile, was rolling on the floor laughing.

Harry just pressed on regardless, "Mum, dad, I'd like to introduce you to the A-team. Dobby!"

The little elf popped into the room as relief flooded into the three adults. It was Dan who found his voice first. "Harry, you ever pull a stunt like that again and I'll be coming after you with a pool cue."

Dobby was standing there, proudly wearing his new robes with the Potter crest on them. He moved in front of Harry at the perceived threat, which just made Hermione laugh all the louder.

Harry put his hand on his little friend's shoulder, "Easy there Dobby, that's our father and he's only joking. I hope! This lovely lady is Emma, our mum. Sirius you've already met."

Dobby was bouncing on his heels with uncontained excitement. "It is an honour to work for such a great family."

Harry thought he'd better explain, "Ah yes, Mum, dad, we hired Dobby to work for us. He's the best elf in the country and will have us moved while we're still eating our starters. We'll leave directly from the restaurant to Devon and spend the night there, that way we'll be ready for all the vans delivering our new stuff tomorrow. Mum, if you tell Dobby what needs to be done, he'll handle the rest."

Harry was helping Hermione back to her feet, she'd laughed so hard she'd been crying. He in turn felt his godfather's hand on his shoulder. "That was really well played Harry, you had us all going there. Your marauder heritage is beginning to come through."

Harry gave a wicked smile, "Speaking of marauders, Remus and Tonks are coming over to help us move. Now that we're heading to the restaurant instead, you might want to give someone a call. I need to let them know if it's seven for seven or eight!"

Sirius gave his godson a hard look, "you really are a marauder." He still hurried away though to give Hestia a call.

Emma was sceptical at best about leaving all this work in the hands of this small being but Hermione put her mind at rest. "Mum, Dobby is a house elf. He really is only happy when he's helping his family. We're now his family so relax and let him help. Harry wasn't joking, Dobby really is the best. And the best paid too!"

Emma couldn't understand why this made Hermione and Harry smile and Dobby blush, then again she didn't exactly understand a lot about house elves. When they'd heard that this little creature had saved them all from the Malfoys, where Hermione was being tortured, Sirius had been determined to free him. That action had cost the little fellow his life, yet Hermione appeared to be saying the best way to

repay him was to give Dobby plenty to do. Emma would never understand magic.

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The restaurant was loads of fun as Remus and Tonks told stories about their visit to the ministry earlier today.

This was the first time Hestia had met the Potters and Grangers, she was gobsmacked by the stories. "You really beat Amelia Bones in a duel?"

Tonks was chuckling, "She took it in good spirits, and they both defeated me and Remus at their extra class on Wednesday. I also heard there was some trouble on Thursday after Quidditch practice, five Slytherins in the infirmary?"

Sirius was about to congratulate them when Remus cut in, "That wasn't them, these two acted very responsibly and had Minerva shadowing them. That there were injuries was purely accidental, Malfoy and Weasley came off the worse."

His eyes were sparkling as Sirius now knew his godson had a hand in that, right under McGonagall's nose as well. He really was a marauder. "Remus, that git doesn't have a name. Just a couple of death eaters for parents."

As the stories continued, Sirius was even more surprised at what Fudge had said to the children. Taking death eaters off the streets and backing reforms, what more could you ask for? Sirius never thought he would vote for Fudge but the minister was currently doing the business.

As they left the restaurant, Sirius rather bashfully said he would see them early in the morning. Harry tried not to grin too much as he answered his godfather, "Bring Hestia if she's free, I've already added her to the wards."

The four bound for Devon portkeyed away, with the promises that the other four would be there first thing tomorrow morning.

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In Ottery St Catchpole, a young readheaded girl was having trouble sleeping due to a mixture of apprehension and excitement. She was excited that their friends would be moving into their new house tomorrow but apprehensive because of the letter she'd received from her twin brothers describing the attack. If one of those bats had touched Hermione, Ron would have needed a couple of beaters to stop Ginny from killing her brother.

The voice from the darkness startled her, she thought Luna was asleep. "Ginny, stop worrying about this and get some sleep. This is Harry and Hermione we're talking about here, they like you in spite of your family."

Ginny spoke her fears out loud, "I just see those bats hitting our friends. How could my brother take part in something like that? He's supposed to be a Weasley."

Luna tried to reassure her best friend, "Ginny, I don't think for one moment that Harry and Hermione were in any danger. Think about it, you saw them take out your family inside Hogwarts. That was an adult, a fifth year, two third years and Ron. What chance would a bunch of first years have against our friends? The professor was there for a reason. If they'd managed to hurt Hermione, then Harry would have gone nuts. If they'd managed to hurt Harry, well let's just say Hermione can be scary and I'm glad she's our friend."

Those words made a lot of sense and calmed Ginny's apprehension. Her excitement though just expanded to fill the void, who wouldn't be excited at having such good friends as Harry, Hermione and her best friend Luna.

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Ron Weasley had no friends, even his twin brothers were refusing to talk with him, George called him 'despicable' but he'd no idea what that meant. Draco had been taking a lot of stick for his miserable attempt at an ambush on two first years, him ending up in the

infirmary again didn't help his case either. Draco then decided to blab about Ron's protective cup, anything to divert attention away from his own failures.

Word of this had spread like wildfire and Ron was now the laughing stock of the school. Cups of various sizes kept appearing wherever he went, usually with a couple of nuts in them. He'd actually eaten them the first couple of times, that was until Fred pulled him aside and angrily explained what the nuts represented and why people were falling about laughing every time he ate them. Ron threw up and swore never to eat peanuts again. His protection was charmed to stay in place unless he was in the toilet or shower, he wasn't allowed to take it off. He also could hardly walk down a corridor without someone playfully aiming a kick at him to see if it worked.

Ron was delighted to be spending most of his free time in a supervised detention, it was the only peace he got. This left him wondering how he could accumulate more detentions to cover him for the rest of the year. One thing was for sure though, it wouldn't involve the Potters. It may be just bad luck but they always seemed to be there when his family jewels took a pounding. He thought the Potter bitch putting her foot through them was bad enough but nothing had prepared him for the pain of those beater bats. Ron had no faith in a little cup protecting him from anything like that, he also wanted to spend the rest of his life without experiencing agony like that again.

He'd finally learned his lesson and would be giving them a wide berth from now on, he was also adding Draco to that list. Ron reckoned he was better with no friends than ones who turned on you when it suited their needs.

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Dobby was smiling as he fed everyone who arrived for breakfast in their new home, Emma was in absolute awe of the little guy. He'd moved everything, including cars, while they dined in the restaurant. Now he was happily rustling up breakfast for ten on their first morning here. Waking up in their new room this morning and then having breakfast with their now greatly extended family had Emma feeling all emotional again. Dobby was a blessing, taking the task of feeding six

adults and four kids in his stride.

Dobby had to disappear as the delivery men began arriving. As soon as the stuff would be unloaded though, the happy little elf placed the items wherever Emma told him to.

Luna was astonished at all the new furniture placed in the room for her and Ginny, she turned to discover that Harry had been standing behind her. "We hope you like it, we also hope you spend a lot of time here. We told you before, our door will always be open to you."

The little girl was overcome with emotions and found herself in Harry's arms. "Never doubt that you're our friend Luna, one of our best friends in the world."

Luna got herself back under control but did not leave the comfort of Harry's arms, "Thanks Harry, I'd better go and hug Hermione now or I'll be in trouble." Her smile as she said this brightened the room.

"I think she's in the library with Ginny, I sneakily ordered a few hundred books to get her library started. You and Ginny are welcome to stay the weekend if you want, you're welcome to stay every weekend."

Luna had never been made welcome anywhere before, "Thanks Harry, I'll ask my dad later."

"You can ask him tonight, he's invited for dinner. The rumours about us must be flying everywhere so we decided to meet the neighbours tonight, the Diggory's are also invited. Nothing fancy, just dinner and a few drinks."

Luna squeezed Harry tighter as she struggled to control her emotions again, inviting her father was something she didn't expect. They were friendly enough with the neighbours but she'd never visited the Diggory's before though had played at the Burrow with Ginny. Here, not only was she invited but her best friend and father were being made welcome as well.

For the first time since her mother died, Luna felt part of a family again. She also felt Harry's arms tighten around her as she bravely tried not to cry. Luna loved being hugged and felt as safe in Harry's arms as she did in her father's, he didn't find her strange or annoying and wanted to be her friend.

"Luna, in this house we let our emotions out. This is your room and we hope, not only will you be happy here but stay as often as possible."

Luna gave a rather unladylike sniff before replying, "Harry, I may never leave!"

The genuinely warm smile that lit his face at those words told Luna he'd have no problem with that. She'd better go and hug Hermione soon because Luna was getting very comfortable in Harry's arms. It was what she imagined a supportive older brother would be like, Luna loved that feeling and couldn't get enough of it.

"Hermione sure is going to be surprised when I hug her for ten minutes."

This had Harry laughing, "Luna, Hermione is sorting out her new books. Even I wouldn't get a ten minute hug out of her at the moment."

Luna gave him a peck on the cheek, "Thanks again Harry, for everything." She let him go and skipped away to find Hermione.

Harry felt someone ruffle his hair from behind and turned his head to find Tonks standing there. "Harry, what I wouldn't have given to have a friend like you when I was that age. Hell, I don't have a friend like that now!"

Harry just smiled at her, "Yes you do Tonks, me!"

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Amos and Tabitha Diggory had already decided they wouldn't like these people before they even attended, it wouldn't be neighbourly

not to go but they intended to leave as soon as manners allowed. Walking into this beautiful home and finding Molly and Arthur's youngest being treated like one of the family threw a very large spanner into the works. The house itself was a hybrid of muggle and magical, they had electricity but dinner was served by a house elf. Luna and Ginny dragging Xeno away to see their room, while begging to be allowed to stay for the weekend, also shattered all their preconceptions on what they would find here.

The dinner was very informal with lots of chatting at the table, with Remus and Sirius there with their respective girlfriends, laughter also featured heavily on the menu.

When Dobby started serving the sweets, Hermione just had to comment. "Cheesecake and pavlova, are we relaxing the no sugar rules since you two are no longer working?"

Her father smiled at his daughter, "Yes dear, but we still expect you to brush and floss."

This led to Emma explaining to her guests what a dentist does and why they were no longer working. "We sold our business with the intention of moving our family to Australia, that's still very much an option for us. The exact same house as this is currently being built there even as we speak. I don't like the way people in Britain seem to have expectations of my son, we're giving it another chance but already have other options in place."

This raised a few eyebrows and Harry couldn't help but notice the look of panic on Luna's face, he leaned close and whispered to her. "Weren't you listening, the other house is an exact copy of this one." Luna still didn't understand so Harry put her out of her misery. "You have a room in that house to!"

Luna's elbow ended up in her strawberry pavlova, not from shyness but the insatiable need to hug the boy sitting beside her.

Hermione was as usual on Harry's other side with Ginny next to her. She just laughed at their blond friend's antics. "Luna, you can owe me one. I don't normally get cheesecake and intend to enjoy this piece."

Noticing where her elbow was had Luna blushing until Dobby appeared and had everything cleaned up with a fresh piece of cake in front of her in seconds.

Tabitha decided there wouldn't be a better time than now to ask the question that all her friends would want to know the answer to. "Can I ask why you chose to build a house here?"

Tabitha wasn't fooling anyone with the casual way she asked, especially Ginny who was used to hearing this woman and her mother gossiping for hours about everyone. The redhead showed her temper as she fiercely defended her friends. "I know what you're asking and will give you the answer. My father told us that Harry paid over ten times more than the next best offer for this land. That gold is the only reason they've managed to start a business abroad. Harry also apologised to my dad and Bill as they lost their jobs for something my mum did. I know you and she were friends but she caused all of this, not Harry and Hermione."

Tabitha was livid, she'd just been put in her place by a ten year old. There was no Molly to scream at her daughter for speaking out of turn, Emma Granger actually looked pleased for the girl. Tabitha would just have to console herself with all the juicy bits of gossip she'd just picked up, the Weasleys had their own business?

Amos was also taken aback by the youngest Weasley's revelations, this put a whole different complexion on the situation.

After dessert, the kids were heading for their rooms. Xeno kissed Luna and Ginny goodnight before excusing himself and heading home. Left with no option, the Diggory's also made their excuses and left. Sirius invited the rest back to 'Padfoot's pad' for a few drinks but Dan and Emma begged off, it had been a busy day.

The moment Ginny left the room she apologised to her friends, "I'm sorry you two but that woman is the biggest gossip in the world. We all knew what she was asking so I just told her the truth."

Harry was smiling, "Oh you certainly told her Ginny! Don't worry about it, I told Luna earlier that we let our emotions out in this house. I hate to burst your bubble but that woman is nowhere near being the biggest gossip in the world."

He and Hermione headed off toward their room laughing, Hermione's had a rather wicked quality to it.

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The holder of the 'World's Biggest Gossip' title was currently floating, and not because she was on a ship. Sitting having dinner served by waiters while 'chatting' with the rest of the table was sheer bliss for Petunia Dursley. She and her husband were dressed to impress and it was working, they were instantly accepted as belonging by these people.

The thought of spending months like this while they cruised the globe had her giddy as a schoolgirl with her first crush. The thought of all the credit card bills that would await their return never crossed her mind. She justified the spending by their instant acceptance, therefore it was worth every penny.

-oOoOo-

Minerva had watched all weekend as the excitement built inside Hogwarts, she'd let the anticipation simmer until Sunday dinnertime. As she stood to make an announcement, all eyes in the hall were fixed on her. That was why no one noticed Albus looking like he wanted to throw a tantrum. He was the headmaster, he should be the one making the announcements, not sitting here like the proverbial spare prick without a clue to what his deputy was going to say.

He sat and pouted as Minerva spoke to his school.

"I understand most of first year are looking forward to Friday's unprecedented tour of Gringotts' facilities." Her glance toward the four Slytherin first years who would be again excluded was missed by no one. There was no sympathy for the four idiots who tried to attack the most popular couple in the castle.

"The Goblins have provided an itinerary for the visit and, like our trip to the ministry, some of it will be very exciting. It will certainly all be very informative, Lord Potter has arranged the opportunity for all muggle borns to open their own vault, the benefits of which will be explained at the time. We will also be given the first ever tour of the vaults and have some of their safety features demonstrated. The highlight of the day will be a chance to see the famous Gringotts dragons, this is an opportunity afforded very rarely and I myself have never seen them."

This generated quite a bit of noise as the excitement was off the scale, the Weasley twins could be heard shouting over it that they wanted to be transferred back into first year.

Minerva fixed the pair in her gaze, "If you think I'm going to suffer you for an extra two years, then you can think again!"

Both twins noticed the corners of her mouth creeping up as their head of house almost smiled.

"Now, as with the theme park trip, we've arranged a quick lesson in order to give everyone an insight toward what they can expect on Friday. Due to quidditch practice and the new defence club, this lesson will take place tomorrow night in Professor Flitwick's class. Your behaviour at the theme park and again at the ministry was exemplary, a credit to yourselves and Hogwarts. I'm sure I don't need to remind anyone that I expect the same standard of behaviour on Friday."

Minerva sat down to loud applause, Albus clapped politely but inside his innards were in turmoil. Was this his future? To be a mere observer while the world changed around him. He was now beyond desperate yet all avenues appeared closed to him. He had dreamed of the Potter lad attending Hogwarts for many years, those dreams had quickly turned into his worst nightmare. Albus Dumbledore might as well be invisible for all the notice anyone paid to him these days.

-oOoOo-

Hermione had her head down and was writing furiously. The lesson on goblin culture was outstanding and throwing up all kinds of useful and previously unknown facts and figures, she was determined not to miss any of them. A silent pause in the classroom had Hermione lifting her head from her notes to see a very red faced but determined Susan Bones with her hand in the air. Hermione couldn't remember the girl asking a question before, in either timeline. The strange sight had also silenced everyone else as Filius noticed the quiet girl waiting to ask a question.

"Sir, I think it's safe to speak for everyone here and say this stuff is brilliant! My question is why are we not taught this lesson whether we have a Gringotts trip or not? All Hogwarts has previously told us about goblins is historic rebellions, I am learning more about the world from these visits than I would otherwise following the normal Hogwarts courses. I feel it's now time for that to change."

Susan was now bright red from being the centre of attention but felt so strongly that someone had to say this. She was a pureblood, raised inside the magical community but now seeing the world through different eyes. These opportunities Harry had arranged for them should be available through the school for everyone.

Minerva didn't need her chat with Amelia to understand that Susan was incredibly shy. What the girl had just done had taken courage and the head of Gryffindor was well acquainted with that trait. She would have applauded the girl except she knew it would only embarrass Susan more than she already was. Minerva nodded to the girl, "I couldn't have said it better myself Miss Bones. We, like you, are having our eyes opened to the world around us and can see the obvious need for change. That a first year student can see the same, and have the courage to stand up here and say so only underlines my opinion that this is an exceptional yeargroup. It also underlines my opinion that the barriers that you have so successfully broken down amongst yourselves should be the new model for next year's new students."

Filius and the rest of the staff present could only agree with the Hogwarts deputy, watching this group had them all thinking exactly the same.

The headmaster's opinion was neither given nor sought. Albus had chosen not to attend, preferring instead to sulk alone in his office. His tentative plans were growing darker as his mood worsened. Memory charms, compulsion charms and loyalty spells were all running through his head. He was justifying them to himself under the banner of the greater good. When he found himself contemplating the imperious curse, a cold shiver ran down his spine as the justification dissolved into smoke.

It was 1899 all over again except Albus was finding himself on the other side of the argument, Gellert had argued that anything was acceptable for the greater good. To build a utopian society was going to have some cost in terms of lives and beliefs but it would be worth it in the end. Albus had countered with 'worth it to who?' That argument had eventually cost him his sister, Ariana was much too high a price to pay and had changed him forever.

His dilemma could no longer be considered anything other than a personal one, his reasoning of the greater good didn't stand up to the most basic of scrutiny. The measures he had been considering were purely to save his own tarnished reputation, Albus didn't think he could do that. To do so would be a declaration that he had turned dark, it would be better if the name Dumbledore was forgotten rather than being remembered in the same breath as Voldemort or Grindelwald for being dark.

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Draco had spent the entire evening scrubbing a toilet by hand while Filch happily supervised his unwilling conscripts. They were spread throughout the castle with the squib and that bloody cat of his keeping a close eye on them all night. He had just been dismissed for the evening with the promise of lots more cleaning ringing in his ears.

Draco was slowly heading back toward the Slytherin common room. He was in no hurry as his standing in the house was only marginally above that of Weasley. Considering that the carrot top was the laughing stock of the entire castle, that wasn't really saying much.

He passed the Gryffindors on route back to their common room and noticed a few green trimmed robes amongst them. He was totally ignored by the entire group, Draco was wondering how he could prevent the Slytherins getting back to the dungeons before their curfew when his world suddenly went black.

-oOoOo-

Ron noticed the drapes still drawn on Draco's bed the next morning, if he wanted to miss breakfast then that was his business.

Horace was keeping a close eye on the group of five Slytherins responsible for attacking the Potters, their actions did not bode well for his efforts to ingratiate himself with the young lord and lady. Noting that one of them had yet to enter the hall for breakfast, Horace dispatched a prefect to discover the reason why.

The seventh year prefect was distinctly unhappy about having his breakfast disturbed in order to check on this little blond ponce, he stormed into the first year's dorm in a foul mood. "Right you little blond wanker, get your arse out of bed now!" The curtains were pulled back to reveal an empty bed that obviously hadn't been slept in.

The panic at the staff table when they learned this news was immediate and pronounced, Hogwarts couldn't afford to lose another student. Horace headed straight for his house table while Albus spoke to Argus.

"I had him cleaning a toilet until about half an hour before curfew headmaster. He left me heading in the direction of the dungeons."

Horace quickly returned and added a few minutes to that timeline, "A few of my Slytherins were in a large group of mostly Gryffindors that passed him in the corridor."

This sent the other heads of house scurrying to their respective house tables.

At Gryffindor, it was Lavender that answered McGonagall. "Yes we passed him in the corridor but didn't actually speak with him. We

were all in Harry and Hermione's until just before curfew." Minerva then had that confirmed by a Slytherin as Miss Bulstrode was in her usual seat beside Mr Longbottom.

"That's right professor, normally Neville walks me back down to the dungeons but we were running late last night. Since Blaise and Pansy were there also, we walked back down together after saying goodnight to Neville and the others outside the fat lady's portrait. We left Harry and Hermione's barely ten minutes before curfew and just made it back to our house in time."

Minerva thought that Miss Bulstrode had just intelligently provided the Potters and Neville with a cast iron alibi. In the event something untoward had happened to Draco, those three would be near the top of the suspects list after their altercations with the boy.

The corridor sighting proved to be the last time anyone had laid eyes on the boy. Since that group consisted of all the first year Gryffindors, three Slytherins with Miss Bones and Miss Abbott from Hufflepuff, the chances of the group colluding in some form of cover up was nil.

It was quickly decided that their classes would continue while the ghosts and elves searched the castle. It was a worried Pansy who made her way over to the Gryffindors as they all had Herbology next. "Do you think seeing me in your company last night has caused Draco to do something stupid?"

Hermione figured she knew the girl well enough now to answer that, "Pansy, Draco is thick enough to do something stupid without your help or inspiration. Don't worry, I'm sure he'll turn up."

As the large group caught sight of the greenhouses, a clearly terrified scream had them all looking up.

Draco regained consciousness but found himself disorientated and unable to move. On opening his eyes the terrified boy screamed his lungs out and pissed himself from fright. This was not a good idea since piss, like everything else, has to obey the laws of gravity. Liquid will always take the shortest route down, with Draco dangling from

the astronomy tower while tied by his ankles it had a couple of choices.

It poured out his collar and down his neck before running off his hair. The alternative route was through his armpits, down his outstretched arms and off his hands. He had a couple of beater bats charmed to be ten times heavier tied to his wrists, rendering him completely immobile. The only part of his body Draco could move was his head, he shook it wildly, creating a spraying image that would never be used in slow motion by a shampoo commercial.

They all stood frozen and stared at this sight, not one person was in any doubt who was responsible for this. Harry's words may have confirmed their suspicions but proving it would be an entirely different matter.

"Wow, looks like Draco pissed off the wrong people. I do hope his shampoo can cope with that, otherwise there may be a few Slytherins asking for a transfer out of his dorm."

Blaise managed to deliver his comment with a straight face, "Now if you could manage that Harry, I really would be impressed!"

What started out as gentle sniggers progressed to full blown laughter with the realisation that, though in a great deal of discomfort, Draco wasn't in any danger of falling.

Ron, Vin and Greg weren't laughing, that could so easily have been them up there. The terrified trio would now live in fear of what was planned for them.

Overall the message couldn't have been any clearer if the wicked witch had written it in the sky with her broom, don't mess with the Potters!

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 19

Albus maintained his stern expression but inside, the old wizard was doing his happy dance for the first time in months. This was his chance to get something on the Potters, the first chink in their armour. There was no way they could avoid punishment for this, unless the decided to play things his way. Only Dumbledore's vast experience prevented these feelings from showing as he dealt with Minerva and Remus in his office.

"I'm sorry Minerva, I must take action. Young Draco could have died hanging from that tower, either from the weight of those bats or exposure to the elements. The entire school knows who was responsible for this and the Potters must be punished accordingly."

Remus had recently undergone his transformation and was therefore in no mood to swallow shit from anyone, "Just as 'everyone' knew Sirius Black was guilty so no questions were asked, no charges pressed and no trial needed. Let's just punish the guilty because 'everyone' knows they did it. You have already made up your mind they're guilty and can't wait to regain some of your power over them. Is it any wonder our society is in the state it's in when you were head of the judicial process and headmaster of the school who teaches the children that this is the correct way to go about proceedings?"

Minerva attempted to placate Remus, he was getting close to the stage where it could cost him his job and she certainly didn't want that to happen. "Albus, you are correct. Had Draco been hanging off that tower all night, he would have been dead before morning. Poppy said that the bats alone would have killed him after six or seven hours, the cold last night could have affected that time but he most definitely would have been dead by morning."

Albus couldn't figure out where Minerva was going with this but was sure he wouldn't like it. He didn't have long to wait though.

"Judging from Draco's condition, Poppy estimates the boy had been hanging there for about thirty minutes, certainly under an hour. Once we had him cleaned up, all that was physically wrong with the lad was

some muscle strains that Poppy fixed in a jiffy."

Dumbledore's happy dance just waltzed into a brick wall, he felt like a four year old being told sweets were bad for you.

Remus wasn't in the mood for letting the old wizard off the hook though, "I, and a few hundred others, can swear on the locations of Harry and Hermione in that time period. They were sitting in the great hall, enjoying their breakfast with their friends during that time."

Albus was now whining in his disappointment, "But they had to be responsible for it, why else would beater bats be used?"

Remus at the moment wasn't caring about his job, one friend had already been sent to prison for something he didn't do. He wasn't about to stand back and watch Harry and Hermione fall into this man's clutches for something there was no proof they actually carried out. "Like Pettigrew, perhaps the real culprit wants to focus the attention elsewhere. Embarrassing Draco while implicating the Potters would be a very Slytherin thing to do. Come to think of it headmaster, what time did you come down to breakfast this morning?"

Albus was totally taken aback by this switch of focus, "Surely you don't suspect me?"

Remus pressed ahead, "Well you have been in dispute with the Potters almost from the moment they walked in the door. You are also the subject of a legal investigation they are bringing against you. Off the top of my head, I can't think of anyone who would more like to see the Potters guilty than you. There is also as much evidence against you as there is against them."

Albus was up on his feet, "That is the most preposterous thing I've ever heard. There is not one shred of evidence linking me with this act, far less to suggest I would do such a thing."

Remus smiled at an enraged Dumbledore, "As I said, the same amount of evidence as against the Potters. Not one shred!"

Albus sat back down dejectedly, elbows on the desk with his face resting in his hands. All his happy thoughts disappearing like wisps of smoke in the October breeze.

Both Remus and Minerva took this to mean that this meeting was now over and headed out the door. At the bottom of the spiral staircase, Minerva asked the question that they both knew the answer to. "So, do you have any doubts that the Potters were responsible for Mr Draco's misfortune?"

Remus gave a low chuckle before replying, "None whatsoever, he's his father's son. What would James have done if Lily had been threatened like that?"

Minerva gave an involuntary shudder, "The school might not have survived. Harry appears to have a great deal more finesse than his father. James, ably assisted by his close friends, would have started a war!"

Remus saw his thoughts wander along a similar route. "I have to say though I'm impressed, he's already outshining the marauders and he's only a first year. The fact that he's friendly with the Weasley twins doesn't bode well for your future peace of mind either Minerva. Yes, both twins were at breakfast this morning. They were far too busy trying to pretend they didn't have a brother in Slytherin to be involved in anything else. Their faces when he took those plums out of that cup and started eating them was memorable."

Minerva knew it was wrong to laugh at students but she just couldn't help letting a few chuckles escape.

"Harry has hung a warning sign from the highest tower that you don't mess with a Potter, hopefully it will be enough to dissuade anyone else from being silly in the future. If you hadn't been there that night Minerva, I'm positive there would have been blood on the walls. There's no way they would have disarmed those two if you hadn't happened to have been right behind them."

Minerva had originally thought she had been there that evening to protect two of her lion cubs, now she wasn't so sure. She could only hope this warning proved enough to deter anyone else, Poppy really didn't need the extra business.

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Ron Weasley was one worried Slytherin, there were definitely others in the same position but he didn't care about them. There was no room for doubt in his, or anyone else's mind who had dangled Draco off the astronomy tower. The all-important question though was, would Ronald Weasley be next?

He had already decided to stay well away from the Potters but Draco dripping piss for everyone's amusement took Ron's commitment on that decision to a whole different level. He didn't want to be in the same country as those two, far less the same castle. His mother had sent him a letter, imploring him to be careful and stay out of trouble before telling him he would be spending Christmas in Cairo with them.

Ron intended to obey her instructions to the letter and then beg on bended knee for the chance not to return to Hogwarts. He didn't care how hard or bad things were in Cairo, they couldn't be as bad as the image of Draco almost drowning in his own piss while everyone laughed. One of Ron's main missions in life was now to avoid that at all costs, his other was to retain the ability to pee while standing up. He recognised those weren't particularly ambitious goals to aim for but they would do him for now, once he got out of this place he could look toward a Potter free future.

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Harry and Hermione had been on the receiving end of some pretty strange stares all day so were actually quite relieved when Quidditch practice started. That relief was short lived as the twins teased Harry mercilessly about leaving stuff just hanging around the castle and didn't he know some stains were incredibly difficult to take out?

It wasn't until they were alone in their room that night that the young couple could relax.

"Dobby!"

The little elf appeared and found himself instantly engulfed in hugs from his master and mistress.

"Dobby, that was amazing!"

The little fellow was exceedingly happy, "I found him asleep in the corridor, exactly where you said he would be. Bad former young master spent the night in the room Harry Potter told Dobby about. Dobby had to leave when they began searching but hoped bad former young master would wake up in time."

Hermione was gushing with praise for their little friend, "Dobby, it was perfect. You followed your instructions exactly and everyone saw us sitting in the hall for breakfast. You're the best Dobby!"

There were now tears running down the elf's cheeks. Dobby wasn't used to praise, more likely to being hit or cursed for his actions. Former young bad master had been the worst for that, calling on Dobby when he wanted to practice a new curse. Dobby now was in a good family. No, Dobby now was in a great family!

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Wednesday was no better for the Potters, though there now at least was some respect contained in the stares directed at them.

Cedric warily approached the young couple, "Hello, I'm Cedric Diggory. I heard from my parents that you are our new neighbours, they insisted I introduce myself to you."

Harry warmly shook the older boy's offered hand, "Hi Cedric, I'm Harry and this is my wife Hermione. Pleased to meet you."

Cedric couldn't contain his chuckle, "Harry, I think that might qualify for the most unnecessary introduction ever. The entire school, no make that the entire wizarding community, know who you are."

Harry smiled back at the boy he refused to watch die again, "Actually Cedric, you would probably find that very few people know who we are. You are welcome to become one of those few. Our door will always be open and we have our own Quidditch pitch. Drop by anytime."

Cedric understood that, with these two, the invitation meant exactly what it said. He also understood that those invitations wouldn't be given out lightly. The comment about only a few knowing what they were like also made sense to Cedric, the couple were nothing like what he imagined they would be. "Thanks, I think I would like that so plan on seeing a lot of me over the holidays."

All three walked away happier with the beginnings of a new friendship.

Their extra defence class that evening was excruciating. Not because of any work they had to perform but because Remus and Tonks decided the world needed another comedy double act and they were it. The Auror and the Wolfman were really funny together, well everyone else was laughing. Everyone else though was not the subject of their entire act, that privilege was reserved exclusively for Harry and Hermione.

Tonks set the tone for the whole lesson when she arrived with a couple of giant inflatable clubs, that in itself was funny but when she hit someone with one and the club emitted a squeal terrifyingly similar to Draco's screaming, there were students on the floor with laughter. The purebloods had never seen anything like this and, as Tonks and Remus tried to out-do one another, Neville and Millie spent most of the lesson trying to hold each other up from laughing so much. Millie appeared to hold on longer and tighter than was strictly necessary.

Both Tonks and Remus were deliberately bringing the incident out into the open and poking fun at it, looking at the whole thing as a wonderful prank. They didn't want the situation to fester, go underground or escalate, they wanted it to end here and now.

It was also great to see a bunch of kids having some laughs while they learned and any remaining barriers of friendship crashed and burned.

Pansy Parkinson had been coaxed into attending and the giggling girl was now so glad she did. Since leaving Draco's shadow, Pansy had discovered a whole new world, a world where Pansy could be accepted as herself. This new revelation was thrilling and terrifying at the same time.

Daphne laughed at her fellow Slytherin's recent discovery, "It's alright Pansy, don't worry about it. The rest of us just reached the same conclusion a few weeks ago. It's like a muggle roller coaster, all you can do is strap yourself in and enjoy the experience."

After the lesson ended, Harry and Hermione found themselves being held behind. The time had passed so quickly that most people were heading straight for their common rooms anyway.

Remus was in a very good mood, it had been a full moon on Sunday and Tonks was still by his side. Not only that, the son of his best friend had pulled off a prank that the marauder couldn't even figure out how he'd done it. Now that was impressive.

"Ok you two, it's only us here now so would you care to tell us how you managed it? Sirius is currently like a dog with two tails!"

Harry gave Remus a knowing smile, "Remus, I have no wish to know what's going on between my godfather and Hestia. I am also prepared to swear that neither my wife nor I laid a finger or a wand on Draco."

This statement had the marauder puzzled as the couple left the classroom, Hermione popped her head back into the room. "Let's just say we had a little help and leave it at that."

When her final remark sunk into Remus, he sunk to the floor while howling with laughter.

Tonks shook her head at her boyfriend and hit him with the inflatable club, "Ok lover, care to share?"

Remus was even happier at those words, "Always! Let's just say the person who served us food all day Saturday might just have served up Draco like a ham hung to dry."

Tonks was now laughing just as hard with the irony of that situation, she had to answer her boyfriend though. "'Ok, I don't think he was hung up there to dry, quite the opposite in fact."

The laughter coming from the room was not as unusual as it had been, Hogwarts was once more becoming a happy school.

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Draco No-Name was bucking that trend, the blond boy was by no means happy. He was now the laughing stock of the entire school and below even Weasley in his house's standings. He had attempted a big play and lost spectacularly, and even worse for a Slytherin he'd been caught red-handed.

To then have a big play masterfully run against you by your intended targets was rubbing your nose in it! What really scared Draco though was that he had no memory of what had happened to him. Madam Pomfrey had run a scan on him to see if his memory had been altered, it came back negative.

That meant someone had taken out Draco so effectively, he didn't even know it had been done. There was also the knowledge that he had been at the mercy of these people all night. They could have killed Draco as easily as swatting one of those Scottish midges that so loved his blood during the summer months.

It was hard for Draco to admit he was outclassed here, it was also a necessity. He would heed his warning because he feared it would be his last. Draco would be staying the hell away from the Potters from now on and forever more.

He may not have a lot going for him at the moment but at least he was still alive, Draco intended to stay that way for a very long time.

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It was a group of excited first years who made their way along Diagon Alley, they were shepherded along toward Gringotts by Minerva, Filius and Remus. They had no sooner entered when the group found their guides for the day waiting on them, both Harry and Hermione quickly recognised one of the goblins.

"Good morning everyone, my name is Griphook and I will be leading the team who will guide you around our bank today. We shall briefly cover the part of Gringotts that most of you are familiar with before moving behind the counters and discovering that Gringotts is more than a bank. For us, it is now our way of life."

They were then given a short explanation of what took place here in the public eye. Deposits, currency exchange, appraisal of items and withdrawals or arranging to visit your vault. They then moved into a classroom environment where there were forms waiting on each desk.

Griphook stood at the front of the 'class' and offered an explanation of this part of today's proceedings. "For this group, and today only, Gringotts are waiving their usual fees involved in setting up a vault and accessing it by other means than a cart ride. Lord Potter has also generously offered to provide the ten galleons required as the minimum deposit for an account of this type."

Griphook held up a black bag and a plastic card, "Each account comes with one of these included. The bag will allow you to remove monies from your account up to the amount you have deposited. The card does basically the same but has the advantage of being less conspicuous in the muggle world."

Justin held his hand respectfully in the air, displaying the universal sign that he wished to ask a question. Griphook nodded in his direction.

"Sir, could this be used in the muggle world to convert currency from one form to another?"

Their lessons with professor Flitwick were already paying dividends, they recognised that the fierce look coming from the goblin was in fact a sign he was happy, by no means could it ever be considered what they understood as a smile!

"That is a very astute observation young sir, indeed it can. If any of you are muggle borns, your parents can pay sterling into your vaults at the counters and it will then be converted into whatever currency you require via the bag or card."

This wasn't what Justin meant but was a very welcome additional bonus, "My family are going to the States next summer, would this work for Dollars?"

Griphook's fierce expression intensified, "If your family paid in their spending money to an account like this, it would be available to them via a card or bag in any currency they needed. Gringotts takes a small charge for this service but our exchange rates are always better than the muggle versions. As you are all magical, your parents can use Gringotts as their bank irrespective of whether they themselves are magical."

Hermione now had her hand up and Griphook indicated she should speak, "My parents have sold their business and now their house using Gringotts as their bank. Dad said the tax breaks alone have saved him thousands! The goblins are now investing some of that money for him and he expects to make a good return on it. Between that and the interest on his savings, dad thinks they'll make nearly as much profit as they did when still working."

This really opened the muggle born's eyes to the possibilities being offered here, Justin though was still cautious. "What about security sir?"

Griphook actually laughed, "Oh Filius, I like this one! You ask all the right questions young sir. The security protecting the vaults we shall cover later, can I assume you meant the card and bag?" at his nod,

Griphook continued. "Either the bag or card will be linked to an individual by a single drop of their blood, this locks the item to you and only you. Anyone else trying to use it will see it disappear."

Griphook glanced in Harry's direction and was delighted to see him nod in acceptance of his unasked request.

Harry took out his wallet and clearly said, "Fifty Dollars." He was then able to take the correct notes out of it. He tossed his wallet over to Justin who followed the exact same procedure, the wallet vanished from his hands. All eyes then returned to Harry who calmly removed his wallet from the pocket it had returned to and replaced the fifty dollars back inside it.

Justin was not the only one who was impressed but he was definitely the loudest in his enthusiasm. "That is so cool, I have got to get me one of those!"

Griphook was enjoying himself now, something he would not have believed before the day started. He had originally dreaded this assignment but witches and wizards being respectful and attentive was a new experience for the goblin. "The same would happen if someone tried to use the card in a shop or ATM, it would appear to those who saw this as if the machine had retained the card while it made its way back to its rightful owner. If you wish to use this opportunity to open an account today, please indicate on your form if you would prefer a bag or card. It is always possible to upgrade an account or have a bag or card added to it at a later date." Griphook didn't need to add that extra service wouldn't be free. This was a bright bunch of students and after all, Gringotts was a bank.

As quills were speeding over application forms, Griphook drafted in some help to get these new accounts processed. Very few of the children already had vaults with Gringotts, those that did had the option of tying a card or money pouch to it for free.

It was an excited group of children who exited the room clutching the keys to their new vaults and card or money pouch. Griphook had just been handed a note that had him trembling. "We have just been invited to the Gringotts boardroom to meet Ragnok."

A stunned Filius quickly explained the significance to the students, "This is a tremendous honour. Ragnok is the leader of the goblin nation, I myself have never met him in person."

"Neither have I!" Added a very nervous Griphook. He led his charges toward a room he'd never previously entered.

When Harry had heard 'boardroom', he had pictured in his head a large table with seats around it. Nothing had prepared him for the goblin version. All illusions that they were in a bank ended as they stepped inside the chamber, it was so much more than a room. Here was the goblin's centre of government.

Gone was the white marble of the public façade, this room appeared to be hewn out of black granite that had red flecks through it. A case could be made for the room being grown, it actually appeared more organic than manufactured. The room was oval in shape and with a curved ceiling, it was hard to tell where walls ended and the ceiling began. All the lighting was provided by flaming torches that were spaced around the chamber, throwing out as much shadow as they did light. There were about thirty stone chairs that more resembled thrones, spaced amongst the flickering torches, and it was on one of these a very imposing goblin sat awaiting their entrance.

They had to walk around the side of the chamber as the centre was a sunken pit in the polished stone floor, it was about a meter deep with a sandy bottom. Professor Flitwick had told them that disputes between antagonists could still be settled by combat, Harry had no problem imagining this happening here. The whole thing screamed 'duelling arena' to Harry, fighting with bladed weapons by torchlight must be terrifying.

One glance at the figure who could only be Ragnok convinced Harry this was one duel he wanted no part of. The Goblin sat wearing a highly decorative metal breastplate and had the most deadly looking axe he'd ever seen in his hand. This was no dandy though, the breastplate appeared strong enough to stop anything less than an anti-tank rocket and Harry would bet money the vicious looking axe was razor sharp.

Both Griphook and professor Flitwick bowed to the leader. Harry saw this and copied their action, the rest of the students took their lead from him and further surprised the goblin leader by doing the same.

Ragnok was not only amazed by this, he felt honour bound to return the gesture. The slight bow that he gave in return was his first since becoming goblin leader.

"Young students of Hogwarts, you do me, my people and your school great honour today. Not merely by your visit but your willingness to learn and leave any prejudices outside our doors. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you today to Gringotts, as you can now see, it is more than a bank to the goblin nation. I am delighted to take this opportunity to meet you all and will try and answer any questions you may have."

Susan Bones was first to recover from meeting the goblin leader and raised her hand. Her arm might be shaking with fear but she still held it up there. "Sir, all we learn about goblins in school concerns rebellions. After being here today, it's easy to see there is so much more to learn. It's also true that all our money is in your bank, why would we do that if we didn't trust goblins?"

Ragnok's laugh was deep and genuine, it reverberated off the smooth walls. "Young miss, you have just cut straight to the heart of the problem. Generations of witches and wizards have grown up distrusting my people. This is by no means a one-way track as a majority of goblins probably share those feelings toward magical folk. That's why I was so pleased to grant Lord Potter's request. There hasn't been a battle between our peoples for centuries but trust can be a very hard thing to build. Today I hope we are laying the first of our foundations toward that goal."

Minerva spoke for all of them, "Sir, I would like to thank you for your hospitality here today and say I too share your ambitions and goals. These children have benefited immensely from all three visits they have undertaken and it's something Hogwarts are looking to continue with future new students."

Ragnok was obviously pleased to hear this, "Professor McGonagall, all I will say is that Gringotts will look favourably on any request from Hogwarts made by yourself."

No one missed the fact that Dumbledore's name wasn't mentioned, Minerva got the impression that Albus wouldn't get the time of day from Gringotts.

Ragnok led them through an opening in the wall that simply appeared as he approached it, he took them down a corridor toward a facility where they trained goblin security guards. He explained that they were forbidden by the ministry to have an army or soldiers but encouraged to have 'security guards' to guard the wizard's gold.

This raised more than a few sniggers amongst the children at the stupidity of this rule. What they saw next just reinforced that view and also convinced them their money would be safe in Gringotts.

There were about twenty goblins training with all sorts of wicked looking weapons and they weren't holding anything back! They moved with such grace though it could have been mistaken for some carefully choreographed deadly goblin dance without any music. That might have been believable except for the force that blows were raining down on raised shields, this may be only a practice but it was still a battle. There was no attempt made to involve Harry this time for which both he and Hermione were very thankful.

Lunch was a very happy affair, there were some witches and wizards who worked for the goblins so they were well versed in supplying suitable nourishment. It was hard to miss though that every student took at least one item from the goblin fare on offer as well. Filius couldn't contain his smile at his students' willingness to experience other cultures.

After lunch, one or two of those students were wishing they hadn't. carts were soon whizzing them through the underground tunnels at breakneck speeds. Neville found himself wishing for the restraints of the muggle roller coasters, Millie though was doing an excellent job of making sure he wasn't going anywhere. She had a strong grip on him and no intention of letting go.

After everyone was taken to visit their own vault, and given an overview of the security involved in keeping their savings safe, the group once more congregated together at another location to see the dragons.

Harry had of course, been up-close and personal with a dragon before. Hermione was remembering this as she wrapped her arms protectively around her husband. There were lots of 'oh's', 'ah's' and 'wow's as they watched the spectacle of some young dragons being trained by a few careful goblins. That something as small as them could control something that size and that deadly would be one of the most abiding memories of that wonderful day.

When the group finally made its way back to the Leaky Cauldron, Harry and Hermione said goodbye to their friends before portkeying home. With Halloween fast approaching, a weekend where they could just relax and be kids along with Luna and Ginny was exactly what they needed. There would be plenty of excitement soon enough.

A/N - the poll on Ron is now closed, thanks to everyone who took the time to vote. It has made me reconsider my original intention and we should discover his fate next chapter.

As always, thanks for reading.

Chapter 20

The few weeks leading up to Halloween were some of the happiest Harry and Hermione had spent in any timeline. Both loved their new house and living with mum, dad and Sirius just made it better. Luna was emerging more and more from her self-spun cocoon with Ginny becoming the friend they originally thought she was. Both girls were good for each other and certainly brightened up the Potters' weekends as they practically lived there from Friday evenings until Sunday afternoons.

At Hogwarts, things were better inside the school than at any time in living memory. Both blood and house barriers were beginning to crumble with Harry, Hermione and Neville joining their Slytherin friends at their table for a few meals a week. Not one person raised an objection, though Ron and Draco made certain they sat well away from them.

With no tension in the first year's classes, house points were becoming almost irrelevant. They would all have a party at the end of term no matter which house won the trophy.

In potions, the Potters had Slughorn hovering around them like a vulture eyeing up its next meal. He constantly reminisced over his 'slug club', claiming he and Harry were alike as Horace had always included other houses.

This was so far from the truth of the matter that Harry was quickly losing his patience, Slughorn conveniently forgot that all he cared about was influence when choosing who he wished to attend. Hermione was struggling to help Harry retain control while the rest of the class were busy sniggering at the professor being oblivious to how his intended victim was really feeling.

When they eventually saw how uncomfortable this attention was making their friends, the class started running interference for the Potters. When Slughorn began to hover around Harry, suddenly someone would need the professor's attention at the other side of the class. Hermione made sure to let their friends know how much both of them appreciated it.

Defence was also quickly becoming a nightmare as Harry wanted to attack the professor, knowing what was behind that turban and that Tom was now mortal made restraining this impulse almost impossible to ignore. Only the threat of revealing their knowledge stayed Harry's hand. Their friends just assumed that the Potters were mad because Quirrell was so bad a teacher. Having lessons with Tonks and Remus just emphasised how terrible a teacher Quirrell actually was.

The only person who appeared unhappy with how well things were running at Hogwarts was Albus Dumbledore. More and more he found himself pushed to the sidelines as the staff and students now looked toward Minerva for leadership.

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The weekend before Halloween was tense in the Potter / Granger / Black household, all had their own thoughts on the rapidly approaching day. Luna picked up on this tension and waited until she had Harry alone before having a quick word with him about this.

"Harry, is there something wrong? Ginny and I can return home if you need some time alone as a family."

Harry was now angry with himself for making Luna feel uncomfortable, he should have known she would soon discover they were worried about something. The Luna Lovegood they had known before would always understand how people were feeling, she just didn't possess the social skills or confidence to do anything about it. This Luna wouldn't suffer from those problems if he and Hermione had anything to say about it.

"I'm sorry Luna, this has nothing to do with you being here and I definitely want you to stay. It's just the entire school is gearing up for a big celebration on Thursday yet I only discovered from Hagrid this summer that was the night my parents were murdered. It will be ten years since they died trying to save me and I really don't want to remember that event by sitting down to a feast!"

Harry had tried not to lie to Luna though he found himself getting caught up in the emotions of the moment. There were now unshed tears in his eyes along with a determination that this Halloween would be memorable for all the right reasons. He suddenly found his arms full of the little blond witch.

"Oh Harry, it's me who should be sorry. I, like everyone else, forgot what Halloween would mean for you. It's fourteen months and eight days since my mother died, I think about her every single day. On the anniversary of the accident I cried non stop. Nothing that anyone says can make it hurt any less, I find it best just to hold someone and let it all out. My dad took time from work to be with me and that really helped a lot." Both children now had eyes full of tears as they thought about the loved ones they had lost.

"I'd better go and hug Hermione, so should you. It will make you feel a lot better."

Hermione and Ginny had actually caught the end of their conversation and hadn't wanted to interrupt. It was a smiling Mrs Potter who approached the pair. "I think we can relax the rules for this weekend Luna, Harry needs all the hugs he can get just now." She took her husband into her arms and added a kiss to the equation.

Harry buried his head into her neck, inhaling her sent. "I so love smart girls! You are definitely right Luna, hugging Hermione makes me feel much, much better."

Hermione held him tighter as she heard both girls sighing at the tender emotions expressed in his voice, she couldn't help but play along with him. "Well, a certain other smart girl that you love has suggested that we all go out to see a movie."

Harry could instantly see that this excited Luna and Ginny, neither of whom had ever been to a cinema before.

"Ok, I agree with mum. But it has to be something cheerful, not some 'chic flick'. Ghost is a definite no-no."

This had Hermione giggling, more at Ginny and Luna's expressions as they hadn't a clue what Harry had just said. "Mum suggested 'Beauty and the Beast', what do you think?"

Harry appeared to think for a moment as all three girls now focused on him. "Well you my Hermione are certainly a beauty, so that means I'll have to be beastly!" He started tickling Hermione and her shrieks could be heard all over the house.

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It was a tearful Monday morning as Emma had to fight every instinct she possessed in order to let her children return to that bloody school. She currently had Harry gripped in a hug that was starting to affect his vision. "Mum, we'll be fine. I promise we'll come straight home as soon as it's all over."

These words of comfort from her son didn't appear to help as the tears began to flow, she was sending her children into battle and Emma's heart was breaking. Hermione could offer no aid as she was currently being held in a similar grip by her father, Sirius was in the queue awaiting his opportunity to do the same. It really rankled with the adults that they were supposed to sit here while the kids walked into danger to do the fighting.

Their plan had sounded good in theory but now it was upon them, theory could bugger off! There wouldn't be much sleep to be had inside that house as they waited on Thursday night coming around.

Sirius had begged for the chance to be there, he was supposed to protect these children and there was still a lot that could go wrong. He didn't want them in there with only each other as back-up. Neither Harry nor Hermione would hear of it.

The most they would allow was a note to his fellow marauder asking Remus to keep an eye on Harry because he now understood the significance of Halloween. Those bastards who had the chance to raise Harry hadn't even told him that much. He gave a small grin at the thought of Hermione's revenge on them. Both Granger girls could easily have been marauders, they were very sneaky which turned

into utter ruthlessness if their family was being adversely affected. Sirius finally got to hug Hermione goodbye as Dan now had his arms around Harry.

To Dan this was like that horrible day all over again, he could only repeat the words he said then. "Bring her home to us son, that's all I ask. I know she'll have your back covered so you just bring her home. No heroics and no taking chances, do what you need to do and get the hell out of there. We'll be waiting on you both." Dan was now trying to comfort his crying wife as Sirius pulled Harry into the hug with Hermione.

"You let Remus know if you need a hand, if I can think of a good enough excuse I'll be there as well."

Harry was about to argue but could see it would do no good. Sirius wouldn't balls-up the plan on a whim but would spend the rest of the week trying to figure some plausible excuse.

Harry now had both arms around Hermione as she activated the portkey that took them away.

Emma broke down as soon as they left, Dan was holding his wife but her gaze was fixed on Sirius. "You're supposed to be a marauder, I want your word you'll be there in that hall. I don't care what age they are, those are our children and they need you in that hall. We can't do it so it has to be you, I want your word Sirius."

The smile that graced his face never quite reached his eyes. Dan immediately felt a lot better while Emma's tears stopped as her mouth dropped open at what the smile meant.

"Did you honestly think I was going to let those two face that evil bastard alone? I didn't say anything sooner because I want them both to react naturally when I arrive. The only way we can walk away from this is if no one finds out about their knowledge of the future."

Emma slowly approached him, "Sirius, I'm not sure whether to kiss you or introduce my knee to your groin!" Emma kissed the now worried marauder on the cheek, "You could have at least told us?"

"Sorry folks, again I didn't want anyone giving the game away. I have it figured so Remus and I will have their backs, not that Remus will know anything about it."

Emma left to freshen up, Sirius watched her leave before turning to Dan with a wide smile on his face, "She called them our children!" That particular thought would keep the smile on the marauder's face all day.

Dan was happy to see his reaction to being considered family, Sirius and Harry were actually so alike in that respect. Dan couldn't bring himself to smile though, like his wife he felt as if they'd just sent their children into battle. Nothing in his life had prepared him for that, the laws of nature dictate it should be the other way around.

For the first time ever he appreciated Hermione wiping their memories and sending them to Australia. Having to wait until Thursday night to discover how things went was terrible and already eating away at him. Knowing his daughter had been in mortal peril for a year with no way to receive information, even if she was alive or dead, would have been his worst nightmare. He just hoped he got the chance to thank her for it on Thursday evening.

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Harry and Hermione took a few moments to embrace and get their game faces on before heading toward Hogwarts and beginning their week, a week that would change everything.

Monday evening after dinner found most of the first years crammed into Harry and Hermione's quarters, this had become the norm since they were busy the other three nights and left on Fridays. It was quite crushed but a chance to catch up with what they had missed since Friday while setting everyone up for the rest of the week.

When they all left for curfew, Harry ignored the now empty space and kept Hermione on his lap, where she'd been perched for most of the evening. She snuggled in and gave him a small kiss before speaking.

"You sir, are not as good an actor as you think. Lavender and Parvati pulled me aside earlier to ask what was wrong with you."

Harry couldn't quite believe it, "Well those two have certainly changed, before it was all gossip, fashion and boys! What did you tell them?"

"I stuck pretty much to what you said to Luna, there's enough truth in there to explain why we're a bit off this week."

Harry nodded in agreement, "Do you think anyone else will notice."

Hermione smiled at her husband's naivety, "Those two girls haven't changed that much, the entire school will know by breakfast."

Hermione wasn't far wrong with her prediction, they found their friends sticking even closer than usual. Neville especially appeared determined not to let them out of his sight and be there for them. Oliver Wood almost had a fit when a Slytherin appeared at their Quidditch practice, Where Neville went, Millie followed! The rest of the team had no problem with her being there so Oliver was forced to backtrack. She was clearly there to offer support to her friend, not spy for Slytherin. The three Gryffindor chasers thought it was so sweet and the twins backed Harry on principle.

Harry had a lump in his throat as he found all their friends waiting on them to escort them back to their room, he wasn't the only one. A certain feline animagus felt her heart fill with pride at the caring actions of these children as they rallied around their friends. She was in her cat form to ensure there wasn't a repeat of any attacks though really she just wanted to keep an eye on them, the gossip about Harry feeling down had also reached the staff. Minerva had wept at the death of Lily and James, raged at the placing of Harry with those dammed muggles but he would have made his parents so proud.

Remus and Tonks also noticed the slight change in behaviour at the Wednesday extra defence class, it was hard to put your finger on it but it was definitely there. The entire class had become one large group of friends who appeared determined to be there for one of their own who was hurting. Both adults felt quite humble while witnessing this unconscious display of caring.

A very happy Professor Flitwick was distributing points like confetti as his classroom began to resemble an explosion in a pillow factory. There were feathers flying about everywhere as the first years swished and flicked and laughed while their feathers rose into the air. The group had covered this in the Potters room on Monday night so everyone was prepared to perform the charm and had managed it before the period was even half way through.

Ron sat with Crabbe, Goyle and Draco, waving his wand about like he was shovelling coal. The draft caused by all that waving might eventually move his feather but it certainly wasn't going to be moved by his magic. He didn't once consider insulting anyone and would sooner have snogged his former head of house than tell Mrs Potter she was an insufferable know-it-all with no friends. Snogging Snape would be survivable, verbally attacking either Potter probably wasn't. Ron reckoned that the third helping of lunch might have been a pie too far as they left the classroom, he felt his stomach cramp and headed at speed toward the nearest toilet.

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Draco didn't think anyone else had noticed Ron was missing from the feast, he didn't report this as he revelled in the pleasure of enjoying a meal without having to watch Ron eat.

Harry and Hermione had also noticed that Slytherin was missing a first year, that wandless bowel loosening hex Harry had performed should keep Ron occupied for another hour at least! The equivalent of Troll Chanel number five sprayed on the toilet door should make sure his date arrived, after that it was up to fate. He had the same chance as Hermione did in her first year, except Harry wasn't going to be racing to his rescue.

Harry and Hermione had other things on their minds, He was like a coiled spring ready to leap into action. Hermione was every bit as nervous as her husband though managed to hide it better. Both were desperately trying not to stare at the doors. When the doors did crash open, they were not the only ones to jump, they were the only ones to think Quirrell was early. They certainly weren't the only ones who

wondered what the hell was going on here. Harry swore that if this ruined everything, there would still be a murder committed here tonight.

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Remus couldn't believe who was walking toward him. "What are you doing here?"

"And hello to you to love! Here was me thinking you would be pleased to see me."

Remus was sure she was joking but welcomed his girlfriend with a kiss anyway. He also wasn't sure if you were supposed to kiss an auror in uniform, Tonks just looked so hot in it. She had roared with laughter when he had said he didn't want her to change into anyone else for him, though she could change into her uniform anytime she wanted.

When she had calmed down and figured out that Remus only wanted her for herself, being an auror was a big part of who she was, Tonks started to think that this one might actually be a keeper.

Sirius couldn't contain his smile as he watched both of them, he might not be so adept at reading Tonks yet but Moony was head over heels for the girl. He'd never seen his fellow marauder happier.

"When you two are quite finished, Auror Tonks and Lord Black have official business in Hogwarts castle tonight."

Remus gave both a quick glance over. Tonks was now blushing beautifully in her uniform while Sirius was dressed in robes befitting a lord. This was clearly no social call. "You do know the feast is just about to start inside the great hall? What am I saying, of course you do! Can I see the paperwork? Just because my girlfriend works doesn't mean I desire to become a kept man. I need my job."

Both had official sealed documents, the second Remus saw who they were addressed to he understood what was going on here. He was delighted to escort them to the great hall. The letters covered his job

though, now that he knew what was afoot, nothing would have kept him away.

When the trio made their dramatic entrance into the great hall, all eyes were immediately upon them. Most of the hall's occupants figured that the evening's entertainment had just arrived. Sirius gave a large wink toward Harry and Hermione as he passed, it didn't settle their nerves one iota.

Dumbledore rose to his feet, clearly angry. "What is the meaning of this interruption? Mr Lupin, I was under the impression that it was your job to prevent these type of interruptions occurring?"

Remus came straight back at him. "Both Auror Tonks and Lord Black are here on official business. I am well aware of my remit headmaster, which is why I escorted them here." The last was said in such a way as to imply Dumbledore should do his own job before telling others how to do theirs.

Sirius had actually been looking forward to this bit. "Albus Dumbledore, ten years ago almost to the hour, you took it upon yourself to ruin two lives. It is now time for you to be judged for those crimes. You are hereby given notice in front of witnesses that a trial has been set for Monday the fourth of November at nine am." Sirius made a great show of presenting Dumbledore with the official scroll.

When he had agreed the trial date with the ministry, Sirius then asked if a member of his family could present the ministry documents. Amelia Bones had readily agreed, it didn't matter to her which ministry employee took them as long as they got delivered.

Tonks now spoke, "Albus Dumbledore, the ministry of magic are holding a combined investigation pertaining to your part in the crimes committed against Lord Sirius Orion Black and Lord Harry James Potter. Your presence is required at courtroom ten at nine on Monday the fourth of November. Failure to appear will see a warrant issued for your arrest while the evidence will be presented without a defence."

Albus shakily accepted his second notice of the evening. On one level he'd been aware both would be coming but had been so confident in his ability to get himself out of this situation this was now most definitely a shock to the system. He was just about to experience one of a far greater magnitude.

Quirrell found the doors were already open with all eyes focused on the headmaster as he theatrically staggered into the hall. Had he been forewarned this was going to happen, he wouldn't have needed this bloody distraction. Ah well, he thought, too late to worry about that now.

In order to attract everyone's attention, he shouted at the top of his voice. "TROLL! There's a troll loose in the dungeons, I just thought you should know." He then proceeded to faint in a manner that would make anyone who performed in amateur dramatics cringe in horror.

This was the moment Harry had been waiting for, he'd been dreading it all week but now the confidence was flowing through him. Originally there would only have been Hermione's wand that he could have counted on. Although Sirius had almost given them a heart attack when he entered, there was now another three people inside the hall who would instantly fight by his side if needed.

He leapt from his seat and was at the imposter's side before anyone had time to register what was happening, far less that there was a monster hopefully heading toward a certain toilet door. He pressed two fingers hard against the carotid artery in Quirrell's neck. The supposedly unconscious man was instantly awake and screaming blue murder. As Harry jumped back in feigned fright, he made sure to disturb that ridiculous turban the professor wore.

Harry didn't know if the decay had already spread to Quirrell's vocal cords yet, the possessed professor was suddenly quiet as he thrashed about. Quirrell was now on his feet with both hands clamped against his neck, obscuring the damage from anyone's view.

McGonagall's voice though rang out loud and clear. "Mr Potter, what did you do to Professor Quirrell?"

"Professor, all I did was check his pulse!" Harry quickly scanned the hall, "Aw C'mon, didn't anyone else think he was overacting just a tad? He fell down like a big fairy, is he another special friend of the headmaster's? And this is what Hogwarts employs to teach us about defence?"

As Harry had been talking, he'd watched as Tom's turban disguise unravelled before his eyes, the back of Quirrell's head became visible to some of the hall. Now the screaming started.

Quirrell turned until Voldemort was directly facing Harry. When it began to speak, the entire hall was frozen into silence. "Potter, what kind of magic is this? It doesn't matter, I am invincible, I will defeat you in the end!"

"Hermione love, you were right as usual. I will never pick another spot again if that's what can happen."

"Impudent child, I am Lord Voldemort, you will all bow down before me or die!"

The words were hardly out of Voldemort's mouth when Quirrell was hit by an expelliarmus from Hermione. Quirrell's wand had still been inside his robes but now flew into her hand.

"Thanks for that love, I already snapped ugly's wand. You should know that Potters bow to no one, especially the likes of you!"

There were now a few genuine faintings taking place around the hall as the reality of the situation began to sink in. Harry Potter was facing Lord Voldemort – and appeared to be winning! This was probably the only reason the place hadn't descended into mass panic.

It was also helped by seeing Quirrell was in obvious distress and there was now five wands pointed at Voldemort's face.

Harry found the group of five being joined by Neville and a shaking Millie. "You never told us he was this ugly Harry." He could see something in Neville's eyes and was proud of his friend for having the courage to face his fears. That was not it though, having friends and

respect had done wonders for the boy. This was nearly the Neville who had the courage to charge Voldemort and his death eaters. Neville screamed at the monster standing shakily before them.

"You are the reason my parents are the way they are!" Neville fired the first curse at Voldemort. This opened the floodgates as curses rained down from every part of the hall. Quirrell's body was already dying from lack of oxygen to the brain. When his hands were knocked from his neck by the curses, it was instantly apparent that a large portion of his neck had rotted away. It could only have been Voldemort's magic that was keeping the professor on his feet, the multitude of various curses had seriously disrupted that magic. Professor Quirrell now genuinely fell to the floor, only this time he wouldn't be getting back up.

After a few seconds of stunned silence when the dark lord fell, the hall exploded into cheering that almost took the roof off. There were people on top of the tables, dancing in celebration. Harry, Hermione and Sirius never took their eyes off the now still body. They had now been joined by staff from the top table, Dumbledore was demanding answers but found himself being ignored. When a white mist began leaving Quirrell's body, silence once more spread through the hall. As the mist began taking the now recognisable form of lord Voldemort, there were gasps and cries heard from every corner of the large room.

These gasps and cries seriously escalated as the spirit of Voldemort spoke, "Your victory is a hollow thing Potter, I am immortal and will return stronger than ever."

Harry's voice was strong and steady as he answered the spirit. "You do that! We'll all be waiting for you and kick your arse however many times it takes. No one here is afraid of you. To be honest, if this is the best you can do, it's hardly worth your bother returning."

The look of terror that was suddenly on the spirit's face was soon explained, "What have you done with my anchors? They're gone!"

"What do you mean gone?" interrupted Dumbledore.

"Excuse me headmaster, I believe he was talking to me! Does this mean we won't be seeing you again? That's such a shame." Harry's voice was dripping with sarcasm against the two people who had ruined his life.

The spirit of Voldemort acted quicker than anyone thought possible, it dove directly into Harry's body and caused the biggest wave of panic yet to surge through the hall. Harry's eyes rolled in his head and only Sirius grabbing him from behind and getting his arms around the boy's chest prevented his godson from falling to the floor.

"Oh shit no!" Came loudly from Sirius, only to find Hermione rounding on him.

"Oh Shit, is that all you got?" Before he could answer, she grabbed Harry's head and began kissing him for all she was worth. Hermione poured every ounce of feeling she had for her husband into that kiss, she knew they were fighting a battle for his very soul. If a dementor couldn't take her Harry away from her, Hermione sure as hell wasn't going to stand back and let the spirit of some dark lord have him without a fight.

Harry's body was undergoing convulsions and it was taking her and Sirius all their time to keep him standing upright before Remus and Neville grabbed an arm each. Hermione didn't know how long she'd been kissing her husband but when she felt Harry starting to respond to her ministrations, the feelings of love that surged through her young body were strong enough to destroy every dementor on the planet. A piddling dark lord's spirit didn't stand an earthly.

Shortly after that, Voldemort's spirit was forced out of Harry's body, screeching in pain as the amount of love rushing through Harry burned him like sulphuric acid. The unholy cries soon died as Voldemort faded before disappearing for the final time.

Neville and Remus thought it was now safe to release Harry's arms, both appendages were soon wrapped around his wife as they continued the life-saving kiss. After they had finished, the once again near silent hall heard Harry's words. "I thought I was in trouble there until I remembered who I was married to. Best decision I ever made!"

Hermione still held his face in her hands as she gazed into his eyes, "In this world and the next love, don't you ever doubt it." She then gently brushed her lips across Harry's before his eyes once more rolled in his head. Harry had passed out from the exhaustion of repelling Voldemort though he had a beautiful smile still visible on his face.

Sirius still had a hold of him and lifted his godson toward the nearest table, their friends quickly had a portion cleared for him to lie on. Dumbledore was about to poke his nose in once more when Hermione verbally cut it off. "How could you be so bloody stupid as to hire Voldemort to teach children? How many more death eaters have you got stashed away around the castle? Speaking of stashed away, if we discover this incident had anything to do with whatever you're hiding in the 'painful death' third floor corridor, I will personally ask that you receive the dementor's kiss for endangering the lives of children placed in your care. We're here to learn about magic, not to become lab rats for whatever experiment you happen to be running."

Albus didn't get a chance to answer as a blood curling scream of fear was clearly heard through the still open great hall doors.

Hermione merely stated the obvious, "It would appear that Quirrell wasn't lying about there being a troll loose in the school, and yet again the headmaster sat there and did nothing!"

Remus, Minerva, Charity and Filius were already racing out the door to try and discover the source of the scream. Albus meanwhile cast a sonorus on himself. "Prefects, escort the students back to their houses."

Tonks had also cast a sonorus on herself, "Ignore that order, no-one leaves this hall."

Albus couldn't hide his disappointment that his standing with the students was so low they immediately obeyed this chit of a girl over him, "Miss Tonks, I am the headmaster here!"

"It's AUROR Tonks headmaster. We have no idea if there is a troll or where it could be yet you intend to send your students through the school unaccompanied? Can any of your prefects take down a troll?" Not waiting on an answer, Tonks took out her auror shield and tapped three specific points in order, thus sending out the auror emergency distress signal. She'd never used it before but another scream from outside the hall and a body that had contained Voldemort lying dead on the floor should be enough justification for bringing every available auror to Hogwarts.

The rot was slowly spreading from the neck of the dead body but Voldemort's face was still clearly visible protruding from the back of its head. Tonks had almost pissed herself with fright when she'd first seen that disgusting sight but she'd drawn her wand and stood her ground, watching children she had taught doing the same before firing curses at the dark lord was the proudest moment of her life.

Tonks was still doing her job, she then directed Pomona, Horace and Aurora to stand guard at the doors leading into the great hall, ensuring the troll could not gain entry. Having done everything she could and with the students now sitting awaiting their next instructions, Tonks once more directed her ire at Dumbledore. "Do you even have any idea who that is doing the screaming?"

Albus was forced to sit down while his body felt every one of its many years as the shocks kept coming. First was the impending court case that would ruin him, that paled into insignificance against the fact he'd had Voldemort walking around Hogwarts as a professor. The wizengamot might reintroduce being hung, drawn and quartered just for him after that became public knowledge. Watching as students from all four houses of Hogwarts stood together and attacked Voldemort was something that would live with him for the rest of his life.

The screams of that unknown student were like a wooden stake against his chest, seeing the staff and students obey that young auror instead of Albus Dumbledore drove that stake right through his heart.

Poppy was checking Harry as an anxious Hermione refused to relinquish her grip on his hand, the Hogwarts healer couldn't put her

mind at ease. "Mrs Potter, your husband is magically exhausted. He needs plenty of rest and shouldn't be performing any magic for at least a few days."

Another scream was heard and Hermione couldn't take any more. "Sirius, we need to get out of here, NOW!"

Albus again tried to interrupt, he didn't want the Potters going anywhere before he could ask some questions. "I don't think that would be a good idea..."

Hermione's nerves were stretched so tight she was ready to snap at the slightest provocation, Dumbledore's very presence was more than enough. "Listen old man, it may have escaped your notice but nobody really gives a shit what you think anymore. Just sit there and do nothing, at least that's something you're good at!"

Hagrid came forward and gently lifted Harry off the table, "I'll take him Hermione, no troll will come anywhere near us. This time I'll make sure he ends up with the right family!" His glare at Dumbledore as he said this left no doubt who his dig was aimed at, Hagrid did not do subtlety.

Seeing an unconscious Harry cradled in Hagrid's arms brought that whole night flooding back with such force that Hermione collapsed in a heap, sobbing uncontrollably. Sirius had to take the distraught girl in his arms and carry her.

Tonks wasn't to certain this was a good idea but Sirius was very convincing, "Tonks, I need to get these kids home. If I don't get out of here, I might end up back in Azkaban for killing a stupid old man who's entirely responsible for this whole fiasco."

They left the great hall with both Potters having to be carried and most of their friends in tears, they barely made it out the castle when they were met by a horde of aurors racing toward Hogwarts. Amelia Bones's voice was clearly distinguishable as it emerged from the group.

"Sirius Black, only you could turn a simple document handover into a full scale emergency."

"Madam Bones, I'm flattered you think I'm so talented but this had nothing to do with me. The old fool had apparently hired Voldemort to teach our children defence. My godson just defeated him again in front of the entire great hall during the feast. Oh, and there's apparently a troll running loose somewhere in the school. I'm taking my two away from this madness, I would advise everyone to grab their children and do the same."

Amelia and her aurors were so stunned at the news that Voldemort had been amongst their children, they increased their speed toward Hogwarts. The group made it outside the wards before anyone could react against them leaving. A still sobbing Hermione took Harry into her arms and portkeyed home.

Sirius faced his large friend, "Hagrid, I never once blamed you. Had the positions been reversed, I would have done exactly the same. We all trusted the wrong man." Sirius quickly apparated away to avoid Hagrid's bear-hug, though with Emma Granger waiting at the other end, it might be a case of out the frying pan, into the fire.

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The three Weasleys in Cairo were all asleep when the shouting from their fireplace woke them, all rushed there after instantly recognising Charlie's voice. If the urgency his voice contained didn't inform them this was serious, the astronomical cost of an international floo call should have.

"Mum, dad, you need to get to St. Mungo's as fast as possible. Ron has been seriously injured and is currently fighting for his life. That's all the details I have at the moment and I'm leaving for London right away, I'll see you there."

Molly raced directly for her clock, Ron's hand was still unwaveringly pointing directly at Mortal Peril. She knew that as long as the hand stayed on the clock then her boy was still alive. While Arthur and Bill discussed the practicalities of how to handle this and the quickest

way for both parents to get to London, Molly's gaze never left the clock. For the first time since receiving her new clock, she didn't want Ron's hand to move a millimetre.

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 21

It was with immense relief Amelia spotted the three professors guarding the entrance to the great hall, seeing all the students sitting safely inside did wonders for her anxiety. Auror Tonks clearly had the situation under her control and even had the foresight to cover the body where it still lay. Amelia didn't have to search for her niece, Susan came running the instant she spotted her aunt. There were other children doing the exact same with their auror parents, Amelia also caught sight of two worried looking redheaded boys who had to be twins talking to Tonks. The head of the DMLE went toward her young auror to discover what had happened here. Susan refused to let go and accompanied her guardian, Amelia couldn't help but think it must be bad for Susan to be this clingy.

Tonks had only started to describe tonight's proceedings when the minister arrived with his two auror protection detail. "Good evening Amelia, when I heard there was an emergency here, I thought you might need some assistance."

"Minister, Auror Tonks here was in the process of describing what happened at Hogwarts tonight, and why she raised the alarm, when you arrived. She suggested we look under this cover first."

The sight of Voldemort protruding out the back of someone's head turned Fudge's complexion the same shade of lime green as the bowler hat he used to be famous for wearing. It didn't improve as Tonks told her tale, Amelia was now returning Susan's clinging hug with interest. She was nearly finished when Minerva came streaking into the hall in her cat form before transforming in front of Poppy. Both redheads headed for McGonagall as Madam Pomfrey practically sprinted out the doors.

"Professor McGonagall, We can't find Ron in the Hall."

"Do you know where he is?"

"Is everything all right?"

Minerva knew they would be bringing the boy down as soon as Poppy stabilised him enough so he could be moved. The entire school would find out soon enough. "I'm sorry boys, Ron was in a toilet and the troll trapped him in there. It wrecked the toilet and Ronald is pretty badly injured. We shall be transferring him to St Mungo's as quickly as we possibly can and then contacting Charlie. It would appear it was pure bad luck the troll chose that particular door."

Amelia, Cornelius and Tonks had caught the end of that conversation and the minister had more than a few questions he wanted answered. Since Dumbledore was sitting there as if he was on a different planet, he would make do with the deputy for now. "Professor McGonagall, Lady Potter apparently made a parting statement about something dangerous being hidden inside this school to attract Voldemort. I would like to hear what you know about this."

Cornelius made it plain this was not a request but a demand that had the entire weight of the ministry behind it, Minerva had no inclination to cover for Albus. She had complained bitterly about this but as usual been ignored. "The headmaster has the philosopher's stone hidden behind some magical traps on the third-floor corridor."

Tonks jumped right in, "When we were checking for the missing Weasley boy, the headmaster told us that corridor had been sealed off. We took his word that it was and never checked it!"

Minerva shook her head, "It was never sealed off, the headmaster just announced that the students shouldn't go there if they didn't wish to die a most painful death."

All four adults were now staring at the old wizard who was sitting there as if impervious to his surroundings. Susan still had hold of Amelia, since this would be everywhere by tomorrow, Amelia didn't see the point in denying her niece, and also her, the comfort they were both deriving from the contact.

Cornelius was in full minister mode now, his righteous anger shared by every adult in the hall. "This is a school, having anything inside it that would cause any student a 'most painful death' is criminal. I want

that corridor stripped bare, all traps and items removed. This school is then going to be searched from top to bottom as never before. The safety of these children rests on our shoulders and if some people appear to have forgotten, or chose to disregard that, I promise I will ensure student care will no longer be their responsibility." The minister was staring directly at Dumbledore as he said this and there was no room for ambiguity in his words, Albus Dumbledore was finished at Hogwarts.

To set a trap for a dark wizard inside a school was disgraceful, to then employ that dark wizard to teach students was as unforgivable as any curse.

"Minerva, I want these children to spend the night inside this hall, there will be a strong auror presence here all night to ensure their safety. The children shall be returning home tomorrow, until this situation is resolved to my satisfaction they will remain there. As of this moment Hogwarts is closed!" This drew gasps from the hall but the minister was showing a powerful side to him most didn't know he possessed.

"We have one body lying on the floor that died in front of all these children. Both Potters had to be carried out of here and we also have a student so badly injured that he's being transferred directly to St Mungo's. Hogwarts is not a safe environment and will remain closed until it is. The headmaster has a trial on Monday that has just taken on even more importance. The ministry is putting its house in order, it's long past time for Hogwarts to received the same treatment."

The hall was disturbed by Ron Weasley being floated past the doors on a stretcher, the twins zoomed to their brother's side. Ron was unconscious and swathed in bandages, Fred and George only had a few seconds to see him as Madam Pomfrey wanted to get to the hospital right away.

Dumbledore had sat there unmoving since the Potters left, he might have been made from stone for all the reaction he showed to what was happening around him. He was having an internal discussion with himself as the spirit's words had shattered his universe. They

had consigned him to not only ignominy, but to spend the rest of his life in Azkaban!

As a final resort, Albus intended to reveal the presence of Voldemort's horcruxes, explaining how the evil wizard had used them to survive. The magical world would then throw themselves at his feet and beg him to destroy these abominations, the name of Albus Dumbledore would once again be revered. They wouldn't be able to lock him up since they needed him.

The revelation from Tom that they were gone and he wouldn't be back heralded the destruction of one Albus Dumbledore. There were two questions that it was imperative he find the answers to before he was arrested. As far as he was aware, the only other person with any knowledge of horcruxes was Horace. How could it be possible they were not only discovered, but destroyed without him knowing?

The second question was, if anything more puzzling and even more urgent he find the answer to. How can the horcruxes be destroyed when there was one inside Harry Potter's head? Neither can live while the other survives, Harry Potter had to die before the dark lord could be banished forever.

Albus just received a bigger jolt than that time he'd peed up against an electrified fence. Honestly, using electricity to ensure a few sheep didn't stray, muggles were indeed strange.

Now he understood what was going on here, all the pieces fell into place. He should have known there was no way an eleven year old boy could have outsmarted Albus Dumbledore!

He came out of his self-imposed stupor to see the minister, Minerva and Amelia staring directly at him. Albus knew he didn't have a moment to lose so acted immediately.

"Cornelius, things here are not what they seem and we must act at once to rectify the situation."

"Dumbledore, that's the first thing you've said I've agreed with in months!"

Albus missed the sarcasm, too focused on his own brilliance. He also completely ignored the little voice inside his head saying he was ill and should see Poppy before someone got hurt. "I'm glad you see it too Cornelius, the dark lord must be stopped immediately!"

Every pair of eyes except Dumbledore's turned as one to stare at the dead body lying underneath the sheet, all wondering how you could stop a person more permanently than killing them.

Dumbledore was almost condescending in his tone, "Oh don't be confused by that shell lying there. If I say so myself, tonight we witnessed the most brilliant plan, quite masterfully executed by the dark lord and his accomplice." The headmaster was now the recipient of stares previously reserved for evil wizards with dark lords growing out the back of their heads.

"I should have spotted it sooner, they instantly began recruiting followers even before they set foot in the castle. They also made sure to stay as far away from me as possible. That is no more than a discarded husk lying there, the real Voldemort left here in Hagrid's arms and he must be stopped at once!"

Neville was not only on his feet but in Dumbledore's face, well as much as their height discrepancies would allow. "You stupid old man, Voldemort killed his parents! Harry would die before he would help that animal."

Dumbledore's next statement saw the tears and screams returning to Hogwarts. "Harry Potter is already dead, that was Lord Voldemort who left Hogwarts tonight."

Susan left her aunt's side for the first time since she'd arrived tonight, the fury expressed her voice was shocking to her guardian. "Aunt Amelia, if you don't do something about this old nutter, then we will!"

The once shy little girl was enraged and stood there with her wand drawn, ready to do battle for her friends. A quick glance around ensured Amelia she wasn't the only one.

Albus was unconcerned, "Children, Lord Voldemort has been fooling people for decades, he's a master of the art. Harry Potter had a piece of Voldemort's soul lodged in his head, the lad has to die before the dark lord can be banished for good. That piece of soul has somehow taken control of the boy's body. The spirit saying its anchors were all gone was nothing more than an elaborate hoax to throw me off the scent while Voldemort works in the background. That's what Harry's been doing, making changes and recruiting faithful followers." If he expected the entire hall to concede 'Dumbledore, you're so right! Thanks for explaining that to us' the headmaster was going to be bitterly disappointed.

Minerva had been expecting Albus to claim the boy was turning dark for a while now, just because he didn't worship at the altar of the great Dumbledore. This though was way too much and her fiery Scots temper was already close to the surface after three of her first years had to be carried out of Hogwarts tonight. Mount Minerva erupted, pouring scorn as hot as any lava all over the headmaster.

"Albus Dumbledore, you are talking a load of tosh! That boy bears no resemblance whatsoever to Voldemort, either in appearance or actions. He lovingly calls a pair of muggles mum and dad with his wife being a muggle born. Tom riddle didn't have a loving bone in his body, far less the ability to love anyone bar himself. Everyone can see this but you, did it ever enter that mind of yours that perhaps Albus Dumbledore could be wrong?"

Albus was indignant and totally unrepentant, "I'm truly sorry you feel that way Minerva but it won't deflect me from my course. The boy must die so we can all live in peace. It's for the greater good and one day you'll thank me."

That wasn't going to be happening anytime soon as wands were drawn all over the hall, even before Amelia and Cornelius screamed for Dumbledore to be arrested.

The old wizard fired off a curse that radiated out from him, knocking every current occupant of the hall onto their backs. Albus then struck a pose resembling some geriatric superman doing his impression of up, up and away, except he didn't go anywhere. His outstretched arm

was waiting on a phoenix that never appeared, cursing Fawkes as a traitor he was forced to think fast. It was pretty much common knowledge now that the Potters had purchased the old Weasley place, Albus summoned a plate and made it into a portkey that would transport him to the spare bit of land that lay directly in front of the old house. The halls occupants were starting to get their bodies back under control and Albus activated the impromptu portkey a mere instant before the stunners flew in his direction.

Amelia was struggling to her feet but already taking charge, "I want a team of aurors ready to transport to the Potters..."

"NO!"

Amelia stared at Tonks, wondering why she dared to contradict her.

"The Potter home is guarded by the best wards money can buy, they won't permit entry by apparition or portkey unless the people concerned are on a very short list of those allowed access. They will have to apparate to the Lovegoods or Diggorys and make their way there on foot. Remus, we need to go now!"

Remus had just returned from showing a team of aurors where the troll was and had missed Dumbledore's exit, his girlfriend screaming at him to follow as she raced past was always going to see him chasing after her. He would find out where they were going as they made their way outside the Hogwarts wards.

Amelia arranged for eight aurors to follow them, four to the Lovegoods and four to the Diggorys. The two teams would then make their way as quickly as possible to the old Weasley place. The head of the DMLE hoped those wards were as good as Auror Tonks said they were, Amelia was heartened when she heard the Longbottom boy comforting Susan and the Bulstrode girl, both of who were crying.

"Don't worry girls, they'll both be safe in their home. The goblins erected those wards, with Harry and Sirius being two of their most important customers, there's no way they'll let that crazy old man through. Hermione's portkey was especially made by the goblins, no other will work. Dumbledore is going to find himself bounced clear

into the next county. Entry to Harry and Hermione's home is strictly by invitation only, Dumbledore clearly was never going to get one."

Cornelius pulled Amelia aside, "The press are bound to be here soon, that alert will have them running to Hogwarts in packs. I do not want anything hidden but see no reason not to accentuate the positive here. Young Auror Tonks kept her head when many with more experience would have panicked, she then showed tremendous spirit by daring to countermand your order because she had information about the situation we did not. She also just rushed out of here once more placing her life on the line against a very powerful wizard who's clearly lost his mind. I also understand she voluntarily gives her free time to teach these children how to protect themselves, the heroic actions of this young ministry auror deserve to be highlighted. I can't think of anyone more deserving of an award or a more positive image of the ministry to promote."

Amelia now realised that, while Cornelius had definitely changed, he was still a politician. The difference now though was he appeared willing to heap praise on a person who'd actually done something worthy of it and then be content to bask in the reflected glory the ministry would receive. If this was the price to be paid for not only the truth being told, but the guilty punished it was one Amelia would gladly pay. Auror Tonks would have some good things coming her way in the very near future.

-oOoOo-

Emma's and Hermione's few tears were now mainly of the relief variety as Dan and Sirius put a still sleeping Harry to bed. They sat around the unconscious magically exhausted wizard as Dobby brought refreshments while Sirius filled in the Grangers on what had transpired earlier. Emma had a death grip on her daughter and showed no inclination of releasing it anytime soon. "So it's finally over and he won't be back? We're all free to live our lives in peace?"

Sirius was in the process of confirming that when there was an almighty clang that resembled 'Big Ben' striking the hour. The glances they shared with each other ranged from disbelief to rage that this was happening now. Dobby popped in to reassure them and provide

the information he had, "Someone very powerful attempted to breach the wards, they easily held and are almost back at full strength already."

"Do we have any way of knowing who it was Dobby?"

"Sorry Madam Granger, Dobby only knows they were very powerful."

Sirius withdrew a necklace that both Dan and Emma were familiar with, he handed it to Dan. "If you need to, use this to get our family out of here. I can take care of myself."

Hermione drew her wand and was ready to argue that she was joining Sirius when her father physically picked her up and laid her down beside Harry. "Not this time Hermione, I will not answer to Harry why I let anything happen to you. Emma love, will you get round the other side in case we need to leave in a hurry?"

Emma was already moving as Dan placed the necklace carefully over Harry's head, "When I say 'grab this', that's exactly what we all do. No excuses Hermione! You've fought enough battles princess, this time we're getting our arses out of here together. Sirius, no unnecessary risks, take a quick look and then we'll all go together."

Sirius was hardly out the door when a very recognisable voice shouted, "Hello the house!"

Sirius soon led Remus and Tonks into the Potters' bedroom, Tonks quickly told the tale from when Sirius had led them out the hall and Emma's expression displayed more determination than ever.

"It's time for us to leave! My children get rid of one madman who was determined to kill them and he instantly gets replaced by another. I'm bloody sick of it so let's just go now!"

Sirius took a moment to pull Tonks aside for a private word, "Please try to explain to Hestia that I've got to go with my godson. I'll return on Monday for the trial whether Dumbledore shows up or not, I'd really like to speak to her then. Will you tell her that for me?"

Tonks kissed his cheek, "Get out of here, I can guarantee you she'll be there. Treat her right Sirius, she really is a good friend of mine."

With a big smile now on his face, he gave Moony a quick one arm hug before sitting on the bed beside his godson.

"What about Dobby?" Emma asked.

Sirius reassured her, "Dobby will find us wherever we are, Elves don't travel by portkey."

With a quick hold on from Dan, the portkey to Black island was activated.

It was only a few minutes later the wards pinged, warning the residents someone was approaching the wards on foot. Remus and Tonks went to meet them, confident it would be the aurors Amelia was sure to send.

-oOoOo-

Dawn was breaking over London by the time a weary Molly and Arthur arrived at St Mungo's. They were quickly led into a private room where Arthur greeted Charlie while Molly zeroed in on her still breathing son lying badly injured in the bed. Molly was by no means a religious woman but she had prayed Ron would still be with them when they arrived.

Charlie nudged his dad into a corner for a private word. "Ron's bad but they think there's a chance he'll pull through. He's been permanently changed though and the healers were waiting on your arrival for a decision on how to proceed. I refused to say anything until you got here so you can expect a visit soon."

Arthur approached the bed to see for himself what condition his youngest son was in, it was hard to tell with the bandages and bruising.

As Charlie had predicted, the healer was soon with them in the room. "Mr and Mrs Weasley, I'm healer Woodcock. Has Charlie here explained the situation to you?"

Arthur shook his head, "We've only just arrived from Cairo, what can you tell us about our son's condition? Will he recover?"

The healer chose his words carefully, "I think he will live..."

This was the phrase Molly had been praying for, she sobbed loudly in relief.

The healer gave her a moment before continuing, "As I said, I think he will live but life will now be incredibly hard for him. The troll smashed his pelvis amongst other things and he was found buried under the rubble of a destroyed bathroom."

Both Weasley parents gasped out the word at the same time, "TROLL?"

"Oh dear, I thought you at least knew what happened. The magical population of Britain will be reading about it at their breakfast, it's bound to be all over the Prophet. You-know-who let a troll into Hogwarts last night as a diversion, Harry Potter defeated the dark lord in the middle of the great hall. It's a minor miracle your son was the only one injured. I expect the DMLE will be contacting you shortly but they've had quite the Halloween."

Arthur and Molly were stunned into silence, their son had almost been beaten to death by a troll inside Hogwarts! What the hell was Dumbledore doing while all this was going on?

Healer Woodcock continued, "Can I assume you were aware what could happen if your son received a severe enough blow to his groin? Getting hit by a troll's club certainly qualifies as severe. Your son will never be a father, actually we had to remove his reproductive organs as they were so badly damaged. His magical core has also received another shock from which we don't think it's likely to recover. This is why there is a decision to be made, your youngest son is now effectively a squib eunuch. There is an option to wipe his memory

and place him in the muggle health care system as someone who's been in an automobile accident and now suffering from permanent amnesia."

Healer Woodcock continued speaking before the parents could jump down his throat, bitter experience had taught him this was by far the hardest part. "I know this at first glance appears heartless and barbaric but my job as a healer is to do what I think is best for my patient. Consider if you will what this boy's life will now be like as part of a large pureblood family. We all know how our society looks down on squibs, your son will have the added burden of being a eunuch. He will have to helplessly watch as his family perform magic, get married and have families of their own. Knowing that life will always be denied to him. It is not unheard of for families to keep their child only for the same child to take their own life as they got older. Your son is the first patient I have ever heard of with his additional problem on top of losing his magic, as such we can only surmise how much worse it will be for him. With no chance of ever marrying and having children, even the prospect of having a magical offspring is denied him. In the muggle world, he would only have the one problem to deal with."

Arthur and Molly felt as if they were trapped in quicksand and being dragged under, how could any parent rationalise that never seeing their child again would be the best thing for that child? Charlie couldn't offer any words of comfort, it would appear they were damned if they did and cursed if they didn't.

Healer Woodcock hoped this was never a position he found himself placed in with one of his children but he had a job to do here. "We will keep him sedated until you reach a decision. Should you choose the muggle option, he will awake in a muggle hospital with some magically produced paperwork transferring him there. Having him wake here so you can say goodbye is such a bad idea it's now specifically prohibited in this hospital."

Both parents sat there, unable to speak for fear of saying the wrong thing, assuming there was a right thing to say in this situation. Their child's future was on the line here and whatever decision they took it was going to hurt.

They had been sitting there in silence, both parents crying while Charlie stood behind his mother and tried to offer some support by resting his hands on her shoulders. The healer couldn't help as the decision was theirs to make.

It was into this atmosphere that a very tired Amelia Bones walked, she took a seat because she needed one. "Arthur, Molly, I'm so sorry about Ron. It would appear he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. The person who let the troll into Hogwarts is dead and there is currently a nationwide hunt ongoing for Albus Dumbledore after his part in this tonight."

Amelia then took a deep breath, this was without doubt the worse part of her job. "The headmaster knew Voldemort wasn't dead and had set a trap for him inside the school, we've since discovered it claimed another victim. While dismantling these traps, tiny scraps of a school robe became apparent. On further investigation, we were able to determine more. I'm sorry to be bringing you this bad news at a time like this but your son Percy never left Hogwarts, he was caught and killed in a trap set by Albus Dumbledore. He will face charges for this as soon as we catch him."

Molly totally broke down, she was wailing and sobbing with only Charlie keeping her in the seat. Arthur moved over to Molly to try and offer comfort but it was to Amelia his questions were directed. "How? Why?"

"Near as we can guess, Percy was determined to prove himself. He got past the first test only to find himself in a dark pit full of Devil's Snare. The only crumb of comfort I can offer is that it would have been quick. Hogwarts is now closed and the children will be sent home tomorrow, make that today. Dumbledore has totally lost the plot and now claims Harry Potter is the dark lord, he set out to kill the boy with only the wards they had erected around their property preventing this happening. I currently have every available auror scouring the country for him. There was already a trial, instigated by Lord's Potter and Black, scheduled for Monday morning. We intend to add the charges of his crimes against your family as well. He'll go to Azkaban only if he escapes the dementor's kiss. He told my aurors that

specific corridor was sealed when they searched the castle, like everyone else they believed him. Why wouldn't they, he was Albus Dumbledore!"

Molly's wailing diminished as she now managed to focus on something, "I can't lose two Arthur, not two of my babies. It would kill me Arthur, not two. I can't lose Ron as well, I just can't!"

Healer Woodcock had watched the drama unfold before his eyes. As a healer he was trained not to get personally involved, you would need to be made of stone not to be moved by the heartrending anguish these parents were experiencing. He couldn't do it so stuck his neck out, "There may be a third option for your youngest son!" The hope expressed in the family's faces gave Woodcock the confidence to promote his radical idea.

"There is an operation the muggles pioneered that can physically turn your son into your daughter. There would have to be a post operative potions regime but, as he hasn't quite hit puberty yet, they should be very effective. We are not talking being able to bear children here but they would at least be able to physically have sex and lead a near normal life as a female. As we all know, female squibs have a far easier time of it than their male counterparts. The only reason I'm suggesting this is I know the family is moving out of the country to build a new life, the child couldn't possibly stay in Britain after this operation. In Cairo, no one there need know your new daughter used to be your son. It's obviously a bit more complicated than that but it is a viable option and I thought you should know about it."

The healer then faced a barrage of questions and answered every one of them as best he could, the hope was visibly growing in their eyes. Woodcock had been a healer long enough to understand what was going on here, the grief of their older son's death was being suppressed as they concentrated on the survival of the other child in their world. They would do their mourning later when the crisis had passed. He didn't think the boy would survive into adulthood in their world against the crushing blows of losing his manhood and magic. Woodcock was still considering what was best for his patient, he considered the difference between living as an amnesia induced eunuch muggle or a squib female to be a coin toss.

It was also clear to the healer that losing two of her children would destroy the mother, he was trying to perform a balancing act of what would be best for the entire family. It was a horrendous decision and he could only hope they didn't regret it in later years but then again, life was full of what if's.

They finally got there and Molly declared, "Ronald Weasley will be no more, in his place we will have Ronda!"

-oOoOo-

Albus Dumbledore awoke just after dawn on a hillside surrounded by sheep. This by itself wasn't too unusual an occurrence, but the fact that there wasn't a part of his body that didn't feel as if it had been put through a mincer and then hit with a reparo spell certainly was. The old wizard was cold, wet and bloody angry. His last memory was attempting to portkey to the old Weasley place and the only thing he remembered after that was pain. His initial intention had been to use his power to smash through any wards and finish Voldemort quickly. He found himself rebuffed by wards that must rival Hogwarts in their strength, though they outdid the castle in their ferocity at expelling intruders. To Albus, this was further justification that this was Voldemort he was dealing with. No ordinary wizard could cast wards like that, far less two children. The voice in his head urging him to seek medical help was now barely a whisper.

Albus was now sitting up and hazarded a guess that this might be Wales. The surrounding scenery certainly matched but it was the brown / black bodied sheep with the white strip down their faces that gave him his biggest clue. The Balwen Welsh mountain sheep was one of his favourites. It wasn't surprising he felt that he'd been gone over with meat tenderising mallets, he'd been bounced clear into another country.

He was aware the magical community would be forewarned about him by now, he expected the Daily Prophet wouldn't cover anything else today. He would have to keep his head down until he could get another chance at Tom Riddle.

He remembered Minerva warning him that the Grangers would take their children out the country if anything else befell the Potters. Albus didn't believe that for a moment. Voldemort would never leave Britain, and wouldn't allow his cover to leave either. He really needed to find the boy, then he had to kill the lad. It may seem brutal but, in the malfunctioning mind of Albus Dumbledore, there was no alternative.

-oOoOo-

A young blond girl, closely followed by her redheaded best friend, raced along a well travelled path mere minutes after hearing the news at breakfast from Luna's father. Both were still dressed in their pyjamas, housecoats and slippers but neither gave it a second thought, they had shot out the door instantly. They covered the familiar route in less time than it had ever taken before, only to find the house locked down. Luna wanted to cry as the bottom appeared to have fallen out of her world, Ginny was trying to comfort her but it wasn't working.

"Harry said he would always be here for me, that his door would always be open, surely he could have left a note?"

Dobby popped right beside them clasping that much longed for note in his hand. "Excuse me Miss Luna, Miss Hermione sent Dobby with this note for you. Harry Potter has not woken yet but she didn't want you to worry as Harry Potter will be fine."

Luna tentatively took the note from the little house elf, the tears finally came as she read it but they were accompanied by a wide smile. "They didn't forget about us. Ginny, we need to talk to father, now!"

Luna snatched her best friend's hand and practically dragged her back toward their house. If anything, the time took returning was even quicker than the original journey. Luna was practically floating with joy while explaining the note to Ginny as they ran. Soon Ginny was practically dragging Luna as excitement lent speed to both girls.

-oOoOo-

Bill Weasley was in their living room in Cairo desperately awaiting news, all he could think off was his youngest two siblings following him everywhere around the Burrow when he was home from Hogwarts. He was full of regrets that he wasn't a better big brother and just saw a pair of annoying kids who wouldn't give him any peace, he would give anything to have those days return.

Movement caught the corner of his eye and he stared in horror as Ron's hand appeared to fall in slow motion off the clock. Bill shed tears for the first time in many years as the meaning struck home, his youngest brother was no more.

A/N the more I wrote, the more I thought just killing Ron would be too easy. I also feel this option would be acceptable to the Potters, they get the justice required without potentially destroying their relationship with Ginny.

As always, Thanks for reading.

Chapter 22

By the time Ginny and Luna made it back to their house, there was a visitor waiting on them. With a squeal of 'Charlie!', Ginny had pounced into her brother's arms before realising how serious her normally laid back brother appeared.

Xeno was glad Charlie was there, "Girls, you shot out of here before I could tell you the full story. Sit down as we both need to speak to you."

Charlie sat with his sister on his knee, his dad wanted to be the one to tell her the full story and the dragon handler was glad he didn't have to face that. "Listen Ginny, the troll that was let into Hogwarts found Ron in a toilet. He's in St. Mungo's badly injured with mum and dad at his bedside. Hogwarts is being closed for now and I'm picking the twins up later, do you want to go to the hospital to see everyone?"

Ginny was nodding silently, visibly upset at that news. The girls had clearly been excited about something when they entered the house, Xeno saw Luna's excitement disappear as she became concerned for her friend. Then he noticed the letter in his daughter's hand. "Luna, who wrote to you?"

Luna tried to pass it off as nothing, "It's from Hermione but it's not important."

Ginny wasn't letting her friend away with that. "Luna, just because I may not be able to go now doesn't mean you shouldn't. If Hogwarts doesn't reopen then I could be heading to Egypt and you would be left here by yourself. Go with Harry and Hermione, we both know that's what's best."

Xeno interrupted, "Luna, why don't you tell us what this is about and then we can all decide what's for the best."

Luna fought back the tears, the thought of being alone again terrified her. "Harry and Hermione have left the country, he's still not woke up yet but Hermione says he'll be fine. The whole family are moving to their Australian home and have invited us along for a holiday. It's

summer there at the moment and we have our own room built in that house as well, we could stay until Christmas."

Charlie saw the problem, Ginny had instantly assumed she couldn't go. "Ginny, at the moment we have no idea what's happening. Ron will definitely be going home to Cairo with mum and dad but the twins' situation will depend on Hogwarts. When do you have to let them know if you're going?"

It was Luna who answered, it was clear to all that this was something she really wanted. "Sirius is going to call in and see us on Monday, he will let us know the arrangements then. I think we would be leaving soon after that but we won't know until Monday."

Today was Friday, Charlie understood his parents were on a shoestring budget. They couldn't afford to stay too long at the Leaky Cauldron, financial necessity would force them back to Cairo soon. He tried to explain to his sister as best he could without alarming her too much. With the news about Percy to come as well, it might even be better for her to get away from Britain for a while. "Ginny, Ron's not the same person he used to be. Mum will need to spend a lot of time with him to nurse him back to health. She might think it would be better for you to stay with Luna in the meantime. If this is what both you girls want, I will try to convince mum and dad it's for the best."

Ginny felt guilty, thinking of herself at a time like this. Xeno though, correctly read her emotional state and tried to reassure her. "Ginny, knowing you are cared for and happy will take a great weight off your parents minds, especially since they aren't currently in a position to do it themselves. This is a fabulous opportunity for both of you and Luna has not only my permission but my blessing as well. Having met Dan, Emma and Sirius, I have no qualms about their ability to look after you both as well as their own children."

Ginny looked to Charlie, "Will they let me in to see Ron?"

Charlie smiled and nodded, "Mum and dad would love to see you as well. I'm meeting the twins off the train this afternoon so we could go now if you like?"

Ginny didn't answer, she just raced away to get changed. Charlie apologised to Luna, "Sorry but they are only letting family visit at the moment, I'll probably bring her back after I collect the twins."

Xeno held his daughter as they watched both Weasleys floo to St Mungo's. He was proud of his daughter for the way she was prepared to pass-up this chance of a holiday, rather than see her friend being the only one who couldn't go. Xeno couldn't allow that to happen, an Australian holiday with the Potters was an opportunity Luna couldn't and wouldn't be passing up. If Ginny had to move to Egypt, Luna was going to be lonely enough without missing her other two friends as well.

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Ginny rushed straight into her father's arms as he tried to juggle the coffee and sandwiches he was holding, Charlie thankfully took them off his father before it could spill. Arthur held his daughter tight, he'd really missed her in the time they'd been apart. They took the refreshments into Molly as she'd refused to leave her child's side. One look at her battered and bruised sibling had Ginny in tears, she didn't even resist as her mother smothered her in a hug.

She ended up on her father's knee with her mum holding her hand, "Is Ron going to be alright?"

Arthur knew this was going to be hard to explain to a ten-year-old. "Ginny, you know the differences between boys and girls?" Ginny blushed deeply as she nodded to her father.

Arthur continued, "The troll damaged Ron's boy bits so badly, they had to be removed. It also damaged his magical core and we don't know if it will recover. We were left with some really hard choices and the one we decided on was to raise him as a girl. The operation was a complete success and your mother named her Ronda, though we're calling her Ronnie for now. She obviously can't stay in Britain anymore so will be returning with us as soon as she's fit to travel."

Ginny's eyes were nearly bulging out her head as she discovered she had a new big sister, "They can do that?"

Arthur well understood his little girl's disbelief, he didn't quite believe it himself yet. "Yes princess, they can do that. She'll never be able to have children but that was the case no matter what option we chose."

Ginny was clearly struggling to get her head around this and Arthur hated to give her more bad news but he didn't want her picking it up elsewhere. "There's more we need to tell you, they found out what happened to Percy. He never left Hogwarts but got caught in a trap Dumbledore set in the school. He's been dead all this time."

Ginny was now sobbing into her father's chest, everything else forgotten about. She was ashamed that she'd been having such a good time she'd rarely thought of her missing brother, Percy deserved better than that.

Everyone in the room was shedding their own tears, the grieving process curtailed on account of the person still alive but needing their help. Arthur let her cry it out, it took a while before he was able to speak with her again. He tried to change the subject, "I heard from Amelia Bones that your friend Harry was hurt too, have you heard from him?"

Ginny slowly told her father about the letter and the offer to travel to Australia.

As usual, Arthur tried to be honest with his children. "At the moment Ginny, we're in two rooms at the Leaky Cauldron. We need you to stay with Luna because we can't afford to rent three. When Ronnie is well enough to travel, we need to get back to Cairo. If Hogwarts isn't reopened by then, we will be forced to take Fred and George with us. Money is so tight it might be best if you stayed with Luna until we can afford to send for you. I'm only saying this because I know you're happy there, otherwise I would be doing everything in my power to take you with us. We're building a good business and a nice home there, in a year or two we will all be together again and all this struggle will be worth it."

He looked at his child lying on the hospital bed, "If anything, it's even more important now we make a success of this. It will give Ronnie

some security and a job for life as she gets older. You stay with Luna and go visit your friends in Australia, seeing you safe and happy is all we've ever wanted."

She hugged her dad tight before glancing toward her mother, Molly opened her arms and Ginny went to her without hesitation. Molly felt as if she'd got two of her children back, both of them girls. "We can't do anything about Percy at the moment, we don't even have a body to bury. We plan on holding a service when the whole family gets together during the summer holidays. At the moment we have to concentrate on those who need us most. Bill is trying to hold down the business on his own and Ronnie will need us all to be strong for her when she leaves here."

Molly was clearly fighting back the tears, it was also clear she was fighting a losing battle. "Percy lost his badge because of me and I started this whole business, you'll have a new mother as well as a new sister Ginny. I promise you that! I've already lost one of my babies through my stupidity, I can't lose anymore." with that she finally lost the battle, mother and daughter cried in each other's arms.

Arthur was pleased to hear his wife finally accept the blame for all the trouble that had befallen their family though there was one name he would never forgive. "You stick with your friends Ginny, they seem really nice people. We trusted Dumbledore and look what it cost us, two of our boys! I intend to be at that trial on Monday and hope to see justice done."

Charlie subtly changed the subject and they settled down to chatting about what they had been up to since the last time they all met. Ginny wanted to hear everything about Cairo while Arthur was astonished at his daughter's forays into the muggle world, the concept of a roller coaster left him dumbfounded.

-oOoOo-

Charlie stood with Ginny as they waited on the twins getting off the train, he found himself being amazed yet saddened at the same time. Amazed at the number of students who clearly knew Ginny, there must have been upward of twenty who approached her while they

waited. Saddened that they all wanted news of the Potters while not one asked how Ron was. Charlie had seen who his youngest brother hung out with and heard from the twins Ron wasn't Mr Popular but this just drove the point home. These kids weren't deliberately being mean, they were genuinely concerned for their friends. It just hurt that Ron didn't have any friends who felt the same about him.

It was sombre twins who each hugged their sister, George held her while Fred spoke to Charlie. "There were rumours flying all over the school so McGonagall pulled us in and gave us the news about Percy. He got passed the Cerberus but the second trap got him."

It was only their serious expressions that convinced Charlie they weren't playing a prank on him. The questions were flying from him, "A Cerberus? What the hell was a giant three-headed-dog doing inside a school and how do you know about it?"

Fred answered as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "Dumbledore told everyone not to go there so that was the first place we headed. A simple unlocking charm and you were face to faces with the beast. We knew it must be hiding something good and were researching how to get past it, so were quite a few others."

Charlie shook his head in disbelief, "Dumbledore must really have lost his marbles, a class one dangerous creature inside a school?"

"How's Ron?" George asked.

Fred felt Ginny hold him tighter so already knew this was not good news. "We saw him briefly just before he was whisked away to St. Mungo's, no protective cup was ever going to save him."

Charlie thought it would be best to tell them now as trying to predict how the twins would react was pointless, they were a unique entity. "As you've already guessed, he won't be Ron anymore, what you don't know though is the healers have made him into a girl. Mum named her Ronda but we're all calling her Ronnie until she gets used to it!"

Fred still had his arm around Ginny when he spoke, "That's it George, Draco has got to go."

"Too true brother, no way is that ponce getting anywhere near a sister of ours."

Charlie could see the hurt behind their eyes but he wondered if anyone ever got to see the true twins, they had such an act going portraying lovable jokers that the real Fred and George got buried deep. The jokes got wilder and ruder as they made their way to the Leaky Cauldron. At least they had the sense to wait until Ginny had flooded back to the Lovegoods before releasing the worst one.

"So is Ronnie looking really thin now?"

"Yea, I mean she's lost a couple of stones!"

Charlie understood this was their way of dealing with the situation, he also understood they would behave around their mother. He was also aware that to laugh would just encourage them but he couldn't help himself. Charlie also couldn't help but think the Weasley family would always survive as long as they had the twins, for the first time he thought there may be some light at the end of the tunnel. All three then flooded to the hospital.

Charlie wanted a word with his dad in private to explain that the twins and others had also looked inside that room, Amelia Bones needed to be told that piece of information.

-oOoOo-

Ron was stuck in the bathroom, wondering what he had eaten to cause this. Every time he thought his work was done and went to rise, the crams would swiftly return and he would empty out some more. He was aware he was missing the feast but was powerless to do anything about it at the moment.

The smell was awful at first though he supposed he must have become used to it. When someone else entered the toilet smelling

worse than him, Ron was positive it must have been the pork pies at lunch. At least he made it here before having an accident.

"Hey, don't worry about it mate. I nearly didn't make it here myself. You might as well settle down, if you ate the same as me, you'll be here for a while."

This was met by a loud grunt, which didn't please Ron. "There's no need to take it like that, these little accidents can happen to anyone."

This comment was answered by the stall Ron was sitting in exploding around him. Only the fact that he was sitting down saved his life, the massive speeding club passing mere inches above his head. Since the top half of the stall was now missing, Ron could see what was on the other end of that club. He screamed louder than he thought was possible.

The troll reached in and grabbed him by the robes, Ron was left dangling with his underwear at his ankles. He screamed even louder.

The troll shook him like a terrier with a rat in its jaws, leaving him totally disorientated before the excruciating pain exploded in his hips. Ron screamed and screamed until he heard a wished for voice telling him everything was going to be ok.

His eyes sprung open and for an instant Ron thought the whole thing had been a dream, that lasted until he felt the pain and noticed his surroundings. Even with all that, Ron had only one thing on his mind. His voice was scratchy and hoarse but it got the vital message across.

"Mum, I never want to go back there. Please don't make me. I'll do anything if I can go with you and dad."

Molly was running her fingers through her child's hair, "Ronnie relax, mummy's here. You will be coming to Cairo with us when you're well enough to make the journey."

This welcome news calmed and relaxed Ronnie, now it was time for the next bit. "Do you remember what happened?"

Ronnie slowly nodded, "The cup didn't work, did it? A suit of armour wouldn't have worked against that thing."

"I'm sorry Ronnie, there was nothing they could save." Molly gave this a few moments to sink in before continuing. "The healers performed an operation to physically make you into a girl. To complete the conversion, you will have to take potions for a few years. These potions will physically change your body as you grow into a young woman. The choice is yours but we'll be permanently leaving Britain for Cairo whatever you decide."

Ronnie was now crying in Molly's arms as she tried to comfort her child. The reality of the situation began to hit home and the tears increased in both numbers and volume. His mother running her fingers through his hair was helping soothe his nerves though as he attempted to list all the things he would miss about being Ronald Weasley. He quickly discovered it was a very short list.

He wouldn't miss his friends for the simple reason that he didn't have any, he certainly wouldn't miss trying to live up to his older brothers. He wondered if it would be easier being the eldest sister as opposed to the youngest brother? It's not as if he had started hankering over girls yet and he certainly wouldn't miss the indescribable pain from getting repeatedly smacked in the groin. He was slowly crying himself to sleep while gradually accepting the situation. His last thought before falling asleep almost made him smile. He'd always expected that one day he would get his hands on a pair of tits, he just never in his wildest dreams thought they would be his own!

Molly held her child as he fell asleep, the healers had advised not to give Ronnie all the bad news in one go. Next they would tell her about her magic before breaking the bad news about Percy. Molly quietly shed tears for the two sons she'd lost while rejoicing that the Weasleys had a new female member.

Ginny had struggled with the entire concept of having a new big sister, coming along with the news of Percy it was hardly surprising. Arthur and Charlie had recommended she continue to stay with Luna and Molly had to reluctantly agree. They would all have their hands full with work and looking after Ronnie. Hitting puberty was bad enough

for any child without the added complication of changing gender just before you reached it.

Arthur watched his wife hold their new daughter and couldn't help but agree with Charlie, the Weasleys may have just turned the corner. He was unable at the moment to grieve for his dead son for two reasons. Ronnie needed their support and he was consumed with anger at that bastard Dumbledore. When he had informed Amelia that other students had stuck their heads in that room, she had blown her top. She had promised to speak with the twins to try to find out who else had opened that door, Amelia also swore Dumbledore was going down!

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Draco had no mother's arms to fall asleep in and didn't think there was any lower for him to fall either. All his worldly possessions were contained in his school trunk. His father had gifted the new brooms to Slytherin house so he didn't even have one of them to sell. Five students had stood on the platform without family to meet them, former pureblood princes all. They were now consigned to an orphanage and only this year's tuition to Hogwarts was paid for.

They had all witnessed the scene where the supposedly all-powerful dark lord was exposed as nothing more than a parasite, hiding underneath a smelly turban. They watched in awe as Voldemort was once more defeated, by children no less. If it was blatantly obvious to them which side needed to be chosen for survival, how could their parents have gotten it so wrong and ruined their lives as well.

With no money, no name and an icicle's chance in Hell of being adopted, Draco had no future and no clue how to change things for the better. His only hope appeared to be writing to an aunt he'd never met, an aunt who was cast out the family for marrying a muggle born.

Considering that both her sisters had went along with their family's wishes and those same sisters now lived in Azkaban, you didn't have to be a genius to figure out who the smart one was.

This was not an option Draco Malfoy would ever have considered but Draco No-Name couldn't afford luxuries like pride. He would clutch at any straw if it got him away from here, even a few hours in the orphanage was long enough for Draco to know this was to be avoided at all costs.

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Neville was struggling to cope with life, back living with his grandmother. He had gotten so used to having his friends around him all the time that being alone again was hard to take. A pecking noise from his window heralded the arrival of an owl carrying a note from Millie, this put a smile on his face. He was not the shy, lonely boy who left this place a few months ago to make the terrifying journey to Hogwarts, he now had friends.

Hearing that two of those friends were all right had lifted the mood of the entire group at the station. He couldn't blame Harry and Hermione for staying away while Dumbledore was obsessively hunting them, he'd seen the old wizard lose it and wouldn't put anything past the crazy old goat.

Neville understood why they had acted quickly to contact Luna and Ginny. If the first Neville had heard of the commotion at Hogwarts was the headline screaming at him from the front page of the Daily Prophet, he would have been worried sick.

He also understood that his two friends would write to him as soon as they knew what was happening, after all they'd done it before. McGonagall had apparently mentioned to his gran that he had stood with Harry and fired curses against Voldemort, she kept glancing at him as if to see he was still the same boy and had even said she was proud of him.

He read again the letter from Millie before climbing into bed with a smile on his face, he would write back to her tomorrow. He would also write a few of his other friends, no one knew how long Hogwarts was going to be closed and they were all determined to keep in touch. He wouldn't write to Harry and Hermione as they would probably be hidden from owls, he could only hope they were ok.

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Harry was also struggling to cope with his change of environment, he was currently trying not to breathe in as the wave crashed over him. When his head broke the surface, he spluttered and spat out the salt water while being taunted by his wife's giggling. "You're supposed to surf on the wave love, not through it!"

Harry was wearing a fake pout, "How can you be terrified on a broom yet fly on the waves?"

"I'm not terrified on a broom, I'm terrified of being high-up in the air on a broom. If I fall off my board I only get wet, if I fall off a broom I get splattered!"

Harry now had a grin that puzzled Hermione, "I think I've got a new patronus worthy thought, you on a broom wearing that bikini. Prongs would be powerful enough to clear out Azkaban with an image like that!"

He found himself again struggling to breathe as Hermione pushed his head under the water, her giggles turned to squeals as Harry picked her up and playfully threatened to throw her head-first into the next wave.

On the beach, Emma, Dan and Sirius were sitting together under the welcome shade of a palm leaf parasol. Emma thought she could quickly get used to this life. "It's so good to see them behaving like kids, instead of people with the weight of the world on their shoulders."

Dan wholeheartedly agreed with his wife. "Yeah, this was a brilliant idea Sirius. It gives them time to unwind before we head off to Australia on Wednesday." It was easy to see Sirius had other things on his mind at the moment, both Grangers were sure they knew what it was. "Don't worry Sirius, she'll come with us."

"I must really be losing my touch if I'm that transparent. I'm asking a lot without being ready to ask the one question she probably wants to

hear. I don't know Dan, Hestia's a classy lady. Asking her to uproot her life to come half way around the world with me, just so we can get to know one another better doesn't seem like much of an offer to me."

Emma was watching her two kids playing in the surf, "I wouldn't worry about it Sirius, the last couple I know who tried that turned out pretty well. I agree that Hestia is very 'classy' but don't sell yourself short."

Their eyes were drawn to the young couple that meant so much to them, "I think that comparison makes it worse Emma. I look at those two and see how right they are for each other, I want to find the same. That's quite a high standard to set yourself!"

"That's what everyone wants Sirius, it doesn't happen overnight though. What you see out there is the result of those two being together almost every day for eight years, and some of them were very, very bad days."

Sirius could only nod in agreement with Emma, he really liked Hestia but felt they were a bit away from being able to talk about spending the rest of their lives together. He certainly hoped they had a long future together and would tell her so. He'd decided to be honest with her and expected the same in return, neither were looking at this as a casual relationship.

Dan interrupted his thoughts, "We're all agreed though that those two don't return to Britain until Albus Dumbledore is no longer a threat?"

"Yes Dan, I'll handle the trial and set the portkey to take us directly to the airport. I can only hope there's more than five of us on that plane, you're sure you wouldn't rather travel by international portkey?"

Emma was adamant, "This way should be safer, we'll hire a couple of cars until we can buy some. That should make us pretty untraceable to that crazy old man."

There was a pause until Dan asked the next question, "How do you think Harry will react to being told he's not going to the trial?"

Sirius just chuckled, "He would probably explode if you put it like that, I have no intention of doing so. I was thinking more along the lines of 'Harry, would you like to attend a trial where you will be gawked at by everyone or spend the day on the beach with Hermione?' What do you think his answer will be?"

The sound of laughter coming from the surf gave them all a big clue to what answer they would receive.

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Albus Dumbledore was searching for answers and frustratingly coming up with nothing. He was currently eating a tin of cold soup as he daren't use even a little magic to heat it with the entire country searching for him.

This decision was forced on him after eight aurors had appeared seconds after the last time he'd used magic. He was forced to apparate away and then played hide and seek the length and breadth of Britain to throw them off his tail. He'd been using a mixture of apparating and portkeying but still they tracked him, Albus would have liked to have seen their faces when he sent that sheep by portkey into the ministry atrium. If they hadn't backed off, he was prepared to send flocks of them to locations that would embarrass the ministry. He would have made them so busy obliuating muggles that they wouldn't have time to look for him.

Albus knew he would still have supporters out there who would believe in him, after he killed the new incarnation of Voldemort the entire country would worship his greatness once more.

Harry Potter always had to die, it was his destiny. Albus actually felt sorrow that the task was falling to him, but he could not shirk his destiny anymore than Potter could avoid his. If only he'd taken action against the original Tom Riddle while the boy was still at Hogwarts, all those deaths could have been avoided. It was a mistake Albus would never make again.

Albus had no intention of attending his sham of a trial, Potter would be too well guarded for him to make an effective strike. He could be a

patient man, all he had to do was bide his time and wait for that one mistake. He only needed that one mistake to finish the job for good and rid the world of Voldemort. The name of Albus Dumbledore would go down in history, he would be remembered!

-oOoOo-

Albus was unaware there was one thing that he, Amelia and Cornelius were all in agreement on, Dumbledore still had support out there. It didn't help that the Prophet's reputation for factual journalism wasn't the best. The ministry needed this trial to tear down the Dumbledore myth as much as find the old wizard guilty of the crimes he had committed. Amelia was therefore disappointed to see Sirius striding into the court unaccompanied by his godson, the only person with a big enough reputation to do a number on Albus.

"Lord Black, may I ask where Lord Potter is?"

"Madam Bones, may I ask where Albus Dumbledore is?"

Amelia understood at once, "Unfortunately we have not been able to locate him yet."

"That man has sworn to kill my godson, until that threat can be removed Harry will not set foot in Britain."

The full Wizengamot were hearing this trial now and it was the minister who answered Sirius. "Lord Black, I was present when Dumbledore made that threat and I for one think your decision is a sensible precaution. Do you have any objections to the events of this Halloween being included in his trial?"

"Minister, I feel we should start there as both Halloweens are inexorably and undeniably linked to why we are all here today. I have heard the headmaster made some very serious, but utterly ludicrous claims against my godson. It is my intention that the entire truth will be told for the first time here today and I hope we can show that many crimes were committed on both occasions. If there is a dark lord still at large then his name is Dumbledore, I hope most of this chamber will agree with me by the end of this trial."

Amelia quickly agreed with Sirius, the Dumbledore supporters were outraged at Lord Black's words and needed to see for themselves how far their champion had fallen. She called Auror Tonks to the stand.

Tonks marched in, resplendent in her dress robes and gave her memory of the first part inside Hogwarts. They watched the images from the moment of both their arrivals in the Hogwarts Great Hall to Sirius making the decision to get both kids out of there.

There then had to be a short pause until everyone got their breath back. For a group of people who were so scared, they wouldn't say the name Voldemort out loud, watching that memory was traumatic. Amelia got the ball rolling again by directing a question toward Sirius. "Lord Black, has Lord Potter given any reason why he ran over to Professor Quirrell?"

"Madam Bones, it was apparent to the entire hall that man was faking. Harry wanted to expose the fraud in the hope they would get a decent defence teacher. I think he hoped Remus Lupin would be offered the job as he already gives the first years defence lessons in his spare time."

To Amelia, that made sense. "Having seen the current first years in action, I think that would be a wise appointment. Do you have any theories as to why Lord Potter had that effect on Voldemort?"

Sirius shook his head, "The best we've been able to come up with is the protection that originally saved him from the killing curse was still active. Voldemort literally couldn't survive being touched by Harry."

Amelia now asked the big question. "Lord Black, do you know what Voldemort meant by his anchors were all gone?"

"Yes, but before I answer, would it be possible to see what transpired in the hall after we left?"

Amelia had no problem with that and Tonks once more supplied the memory. The chamber watched as Albus made his allegations before

knocking them all on their arses and portkeying out of Hogwarts. All eyes now switched to Sirius as Amelia knew he would have to refute those allegations.

Sirius took his time, allowing the tension to build. "Albus Dumbledore has taken the few facts in his possession and reached a conclusion that has shocked me in its stupidity."

This again drew murmurings of dissent from the Wizengamot members while the public gallery appeared to be keeping a more open mind for now.

Sirius continued telling mostly the truth, though he had absolutely no intention of mentioning the name Malfoy or a certain diary. "Voldemort's anchors were horcruxes that he imbedded into items and hid. We were alerted to this by my dead brother, Regulus gave his life to get one of these things away from Voldemort and it lay in my ancestral home while I was enduring alternative accommodation." He removed Slytherin's locket from a bag he'd brought and placed it on the table in front of him.

"We didn't know how to destroy the horcrux and couldn't trust the ministry as there were still death eaters walking about free at that time. We consulted our friends at Gringotts and were delighted to discover the goblins have a procedure that deals permanently with the soul piece without damaging the item. If Harry had one inside his head, we would soon have had it removed. The goblins were disgusted that a wizard would do something like this and scanned the vaults of convicted death eaters in case their bank was unknowingly harbouring one of these abominations. They found one and destroyed the soul piece without damaging the item, a cup that belonged to Helga Hufflepuff. It has been returned to the vault and they intend to heavily fine the vault owners, should they ever be released from Azkaban."

Sirius now had their complete and undivided attention as he continued his tale. "With two horcruxes being encased in Hogwarts founder's items, our research moved in that direction as well as looking into Voldemort's background. Tom Marvolo Riddle is the illegitimate child of muggle Tom Riddle and Merope Gaunt, a rather

unattractive witch who used a love potion on the local squire's son. Yes, Voldemort is a half blood but that's not important here. Harry purchased both the Riddle estate and the Gaunt shack which was adjacent to it and paid the goblins to pull them down and sift through the rubble. They found this!"

Sirius placed the Gaunt ring on the table, "The Gaunts were direct descendants from Salazar Slytherin which again highlights the founders connection. Our research now focused on any missing founders items and we actually struck gold hidden inside Hogwarts. The Ravenclaws amongst you may recognise this!"

The diadem being placed on the table drew gasps from the captive audience.

"We were actively searching for the sword of Godric Gryffindor when the Halloween incident occurred. We had no idea how many Voldemort had made but were delighted to hear we'd got all of them. The idea that my godson is one and needs to die is nothing more than the ravings of a demented old man!"

A voice from the Wizengamot shouted at him, "You have shown us nothing to support that view. Pulling bits of jewellery out a bag is not proof of this improbable story, what right do you have to slander a great man?"

Sirius appeared resigned to this reaction and began returning the items to his bag, "That 'great man' took my godson from me and left him on a muggle doorstep to be abused for ten years. That 'great man' denied me a trial and condemned me to Azkaban for ten years. Your great Albus Dumbledore was only stopped from killing my unconscious eleven year old godson by wards the goblins erected. All because of a prophecy he heard and slavishly followed his interpretation of like it was the Holy Grail. What has this wizard done to justify this unquestioning adulation? It was plain to everyone who watched that memory that Dumbledore knew what Voldemort meant by his anchors, what had he done about it? In a couple of months we found and destroyed all of them. My godson has now banished Voldemort twice and spent a fortune tracking down and destroying his anchors. Where is his adulation? What was his reward? A crazy old

man determined to kill him! We thought this country had changed but apparently we were wrong, the Blacks and the Potters will be leaving Britain in the next few days."

As Sirius rose to leave, the voice was indignant. "Where do you think you're going?"

Before Sirius could answer, the minister interrupted. "Lord Black is not the one on trial here and has answered every question we have asked. I for one am eternally grateful for both his family and the Potters actions against the evil that was Voldemort. I have not forgotten about the aid given by our friends at Gringotts either. I feel sure there will be awards coming your way in the very near future for your courageous actions."

Sirius bowed toward Cornelius, "Thank you minister but I would respectfully request no awards for any of us. All my godson and his lovely wife wish is the right to attend school with their friends without the danger of being murdered. Seeing justice done here today would go a long way to granting those wishes."

Sirius left to face Hestia as Cornelius rounded on the Wizengamot. "Albus Dumbledore set a trap for Voldemort inside the school containing all our children. One is currently in St. Mungo's with their life altered forever while another lost his life, tragically both are from the same family. Does this sound like the great man you revere so much?"

Arthur Weasley watched from the gallery, hardly recognising the man who led their government. Amelia called Minerva to the stand as they proceeded to hammer more nails into Dumbledore's coffin, even his staunchest supporter had to see there was something seriously wrong with the man's actions.

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Harry and Hermione were currently lying on the beach, though their minds were clearly elsewhere. Harry saw his wife nibbling her bottom lip and knew she only did this when deep in thought or worried about something. "What's the matter love?"

"Oh I just keep playing everything over and over in my head and wondering if we did the right thing."

"OK, I know you love your lists so let's make a couple."

Harry sat up and conjured some writing materials, he split the page into two and headed them 'Dead' and 'Alive'.

"This will be for differences in the timelines, we'll start with the 'Dead' column. Umbridge, sorry but no tears from me for that bitch! Percy, we could have dealt with differently but he was the one who came after us. Tom doesn't really count since he died in both."

Harry then moved to the 'Alive' column and began quietly writing down names. Bertha Jorkins, Riddle's muggle caretaker, Cedric, Sirius, Dumbledore, Professor Burbage, Amelia Bones, Mad-eye, Scrimgeour, Bathilda Bagshot, Ted Tonks, Remus, Tonks, Colin, Fred Weasley, Snape.

Harry paused for a moment as Hermione stared unbelievably at the massive discrepancy in the length of the lists. Harry then wrote Hermione Jane Potter and Harry James Potter, this had tears in his wife's eyes.

"We both know there are a lot of names not on that list, some we didn't know about and others I've forgotten for a moment as this is just off the top of my head. We don't know Ron's fate yet but I suspect he'll never bother women again, I can live with that. Add to the list that the death eaters have been dealt with, we have a ministry that get things done and Hogwarts is better than at any time we ever attended it. Taking all that into consideration, I think the answer to your question has to be yes."

Hermione was staring at Harry as if it was the first time she'd seen him, "When did you get so smart?"

He gave Hermione that smile, the one that melted her heart. "I married the smartest witch in the world and didn't want to let her down, she means the world to me!"

That was too much for Hermione. She pounced on Harry, pushing him back into the sand and began to kiss him senseless.

The parchment lay forgotten and was eventually blown into the sea, the salt water soon had the ink merging into nothing more than a meaningless blob. There was no 'other timeline' only now. Lying entwined on the sand, both Potters were definitely making the most of the now.

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 23

Arthur Weasley had been through the emotional wringer by the time he rejoined his wife at the hospital bedside of their sleeping new daughter. Molly's enquiry of "How did it go?" left the shattered wizard with the task of having to relive the traumatic morning.

"Dumbledore is either the most evil man on the planet or a very sick wizard. The Wizengamot couldn't decide which so gave him an either – or sentence. They found him guilty and, depending on the healers evaluation of his mental health, he will either spend the rest of his life in a secure facility here or a cell in Azkaban. The sentence was for crimes against the Potters, Blacks and Weasleys." Arthur had to take a pause as the painful memories kept surfacing, "They were forced to take Hagrid's memory of the night he was sent by Dumbledore to fetch baby Harry from Godric's Hollow, he couldn't stop crying long enough to speak. Watching Sirius kiss his godson goodbye and knowing what happened over the next ten years had most of the chamber in tears."

"What did they say about Percy and Ronnie?"

"The revelation that Percy was not the only one to look inside that room really shook them up, a lot of people in that chamber had young relatives inside Hogwarts. Dumbledore was held responsible for both our boys. He knew Voldemort was out there but told no one. Instead he set a deadly trap inside Hogwarts and then employed a wizard who was possessed by the dark lord to teach our children. As part of the sentence, the Wizengamot ordered Dumbledore's vaults seized and shared among the three families most affected. We won't have to worry about paying Tom's bill at the Leaky Cauldron, it should easily be enough to move our plans forward. We will certainly be able to have the new place ready for the summer."

Molly was now quietly crying, partly in relief that their family now had a brighter future but mostly at what it had cost two of her babies to pay for it.

Arthur continued speaking, he wanted to get it all out. "They called for a Gringotts witness to confirm that Lord Potter had done what Lord

Black had claimed. That boy has spent an absolute fortune ridding our world of Voldemort only to be rewarded by Dumbledore now trying to kill him. Fudge swore he would be repaid every Knut and not one voice in the chamber was raised against the minister. The goblin approached after the trial to inform me how much the Weasley family would be receiving as compensation from the seized assets, it's more than we got for selling our land."

Arthur was now in the same emotional state as his wife, fat salty tears ran silently down his cheeks. The money would ensure their business was a success, provide a good home for their family and pay for the potions regime Ronnie would have to undergo for the next few years. In one fell swoop all the Weasleys' financial worries had been swept away. As head of the Weasley family Arthur had to give thanks for that. As a father, Arthur Weasley would curse the name of Albus Dumbledore until his dying day. He personally didn't care if the old bastard was sick in the head, he cost Arthur two sons and there wasn't enough gold in the world to make amends for that.

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Tonks had been dismissed from the witness box and was now waiting with a very anxious Hestia, they both spied Sirius as he left the Wizengamot chamber and the auror held back as the couple nervously greeted each other. She led them into a quiet room that Amelia Bones had placed at her disposal for this very purpose. Tonks kissed both of them on the cheek and reminded her head of house and friend that she would just be outside the door before quickly getting out of there.

Sirius was a bundle of nerves, his pre-arranged speech had sounded fine to him this morning when he'd practiced in front of the mirror. The problem here arose because it wasn't his reflection staring back at him but a beautiful woman who he cared deeply for. "Hestia, I really like you but..."

"Oh Merlin, I knew it was too good to last. Meet the perfect guy, fall head over heels and then he dumps you!"

Before she could say any more Sirius had kissed her into silence, it was a few moments later before the marauder's lips were available to resume talking. "It is my sincere wish that no one here is getting dumped today, I certainly don't want to say goodbye to one of the best things I've ever had in my life."

The kiss had settled her nerves a lot more than the words, you didn't kiss someone like that if you were planning on dumping them. Hestia felt so sure she was even able to tease him a little. "Only one of the best things? I have competition then?"

"Afraid so, in the shape of a couple of kids I couldn't love anymore if they were my own."

This comment earned Sirius a searing kiss as the nerves left the room. Neither wanted to split and both were now confident they would work their way around anything else.

"Hestia, I'm leaving for Australia with the kids and the Grangers. With Dumbledore seeking to murder Harry, Britain is no longer safe for the Potters and I need to get them out the country. It's been wonderful having you as my girlfriend and I hope in time we can grow into something more. What I'm really asking is if you feel the same, enough to come to Australia with me and give it a try?"

Hestia didn't answer him, she just pounced on Sirius and kissed him senseless. This went on until a voice interrupted them. A concerned Tonks had poked her head in the door.

"It was too quiet in here and I was getting worried."

She was answered by a rather flushed but definitely excited Hestia, "I'm going to Australia with Sirius. Don't know where, when or for how long but I'm going!"

The wave of relief and elation that swept through Sirius told him he was now ready for the next step, the mere thought of Hestia not being in his life twisted his innards and dropped his spirit to an all time low. He also had a feeling Hestia was at least a few steps ahead of him.

"Perhaps when we're down there, we could start looking in some jewellery stores."

The silence that followed his remark left Sirius wondering if he'd misread the situation, that thought died suddenly as he was set upon by two joyfully screaming witches.

After the ladies had calmed down a smidgen Tonks gushed, "Oh I'm so happy for you both, please don't forget about us. We have no idea how long it's going to take to catch Dumbledore, you could be in Australia for a while."

It was Sirius who answered, "I promise that won't happen, we'll be in touch as soon as we're settled. Right now I need to go visit a couple of young girls who will be just as worried as you two were. I'll be leaving to go back to Harry today but we're all heading out on Wednesday by muggle transport."

Hestia was again a few steps ahead of him, "I can collect Luna and Ginny, we'll meet you wherever you need us to be."

Sirius hugged Hestia, more sure than ever he'd just made the right decision. Smart and beautiful was a combination that was hard to resist, especially if you didn't want to. "Thanks love, I don't even want to chance bringing Harry back into Britain to catch a plane. We're all flying out of Paris and I've got a portkey that will take you there. The goblins are arranging all the travel documents and I understand its approaching summer in Australia so pack light."

After Tonks had hugged them both at least another twice, the couple then headed off to the Lovegoods.

-oOoOo-

The minister and the head of the DMLE were meeting with the Deputy Head of Hogwarts to attempt a workable solution to their problem. Hogwarts had been searched from top to bottom and was now considered by the ministry to be safe. Amelia though had honestly stated she had no idea when Dumbledore would be

apprehended. At the moment the old wizard appeared fixated purely on Harry Potter but what if that changed?

Cornelius now had a really difficult decision to make, he couldn't run the country under the auspices of 'what if's. He would have to make the decision based on the best information he had, also monitoring the situation and have contingency plans in place.

"Minerva, I think we should open Hogwarts on Friday. That will give everyone the weekend to settle in before classes begin on Monday. I would also like you to take over as headmistress on a temporary basis for now, the entire Hogwarts situation is going to have to be watched closely until Dumbledore is no longer a threat. Have you any thoughts on replacements for the defence and transfiguration professors?"

"I intend to continue teaching, though perhaps employ someone else to take the first and second years to free up some of my time. The defence position has an outstanding replacement already in the castle, would I receive ministry backing for employing someone suffering from lycanthropy to teach the children?"

Cornelius didn't hesitate in the slightest, "I have heard nothing but good reports about Remus Lupin, from ministry employees and children he's already taught. I can help you also with the security position if he moves. I want to station aurors inside the castle to continue that function, at least until Dumbledore is caught"

Both witches present were delighted with this solution, should Dumbledore change tactics then a visit to Hogwarts was bound to be high on his to-do list. Having an auror presence in the castle would aid with detection and hopefully keep him occupied until reinforcements arrived. All three were worried about the effect today's revelations and judgement might have on whatever sanity the old wizard had left. A crazy rogue Dumbledore was every bit as big a threat as any dark lord.

-oOoOo-

A beaming Sirius had Hestia on his arm as they watched two ten-year-olds come racing down the path toward them. The girls must have been keeping watch for the first sight of him, a quick hello was greeted by a constant barrage of questions, almost all of them concerning the health of their two missing friends.

"Hey you two, Harry and Hermione are fine, they're missing you both but hope to see you later this week. Before I can say any more, I need to speak with your father Luna."

Xeno was waiting on them in the house, he'd missed attending the trial as he was told the girls would be contacted about their trip to Australia today. Luna's happiness was way more important to Xeno than any story.

"Hello Xeno, I assume you know why I'm here?"

Xeno nodded enthusiastically, "To give the Quibbler the exclusive on when the Hobgoblins are getting back together again."

That took the wind out the marauder's sails until Xeno laughed, "Only joking, I know it's about the girls going to Australia and my answer is yes."

Two hyper girls were now trying to contain their excitement, they weren't helped by Sirius and Hestia being just as excited as he laid out the details.

Ginny was almost hyperventilating. She'd never been further than Diagon Alley yet here she was, portkeying to Paris before climbing in a giant flying thing to the other side of the world. She would have to remember every little detail to tell her dad.

Hestia was taking the girls to Gringotts tomorrow where all the travel arrangements would be finalised. They would all meet in the airport at eight o'clock on Wednesday evening before they boarded the plane. Neither Hestia, Luna nor Ginny expected to get much sleep before then, the excitement levels were sky high.

After saying goodbye to the girls and Xeno, Sirius and Hestia headed off to 'check the house'. Really they just wanted some time alone before Sirius had to return to Harry on the island. Hestia would have loved to return with him but there would be barely enough time to accomplish what she needed to get done before setting off on Wednesday evening.

-oOoOo-

The five were sitting under the shade of a parasol as Sirius explained what happened at the trial, it had gone pretty much as they expected. When he told them about his conversation with Xeno and the fate that had befallen the youngest Weasley boy, none of them were sure what to say to that revelation.

It was Hermione who finally spoke, "I can live with that result, I was really worried at how I was going to face Ginny on Wednesday with two of her brothers gone. The main thing is he will never hurt anyone again."

If Hermione could live with that, then Harry would too. "I think you mean 'she won't hurt' love. Do you think it would be taking revenge a step too far if we set her up on a date with Crabbe or Goyle, or even both?"

Hermione tried to look sternly at her husband, she really did but when the giggles took hold she couldn't help herself. A lot of anxiety and tension eased from her body as she dissolved into laughter with the thought of Ron Macho Weasley in a little flowery print dress. Like Neville putting a dress on his bogart image of Snape, this exorcised the last of her fears away. He'd received what Hermione considered poetic justice and she didn't have killing him on her conscience. Yes, she could live with Ronda Weasley living out the rest of her life in Egypt.

It was Emma though who brought up another point, "Do you think the changes you made turned the old man mad or was it there all along and this just exposed it?"

It was a thoughtful Harry who answered, "We may have hurried him along the road a bit but I think he would have gotten there anyway. When you look at some of the decisions he made, there really had to be something wrong with him. The whole 'trap Voldemort' stunt was doomed to failure, three first years were able to beat his traps. Then to give a twelve year old the ability to alter time was crazy, irresponsible and anything else you want to add in there. The heir of Slytherin / basilisk fiasco was followed by dementors around the school, don't even mention that bloody tournament. Then for a full year he doesn't speak to me but allows Snape into my head. I told him what Draco was up to, he put the safety of the entire school at risk trying to save one boy who'd already made his choice. His final gifts to us were all a sick joke, I can imagine him chuckling as we nearly got killed on numerous occasions trying to solve the bloody clues."

Harry's voice had gotten quieter as he'd went on, it was now barely above a whisper. "He'd arranged my whole life so I would walk into that forest and let Voldemort kill me. There was no back-up plan or 'what to do if you survive' in place. I had a piece of that bastard's soul in my head and he never told me, far less did anything about it. I need to believe he was going senile, otherwise I have to really, really hate him. I don't want to do that, I just want to live my life in peace with my family. That shouldn't be too much to ask, surely?"

Hermione had her arm around Harry and her head resting on his shoulder, "It's like when you made that list Harry, it's only when you see it all together that you realise that everyone was passing off the old man's craziness as eccentricity. He won't get anywhere near us love, we won't be returning to Britain until he's no longer a threat. We didn't take down Voldemort just to let Dumbledore beat us."

Sirius quickly agreed with the young girl, "When we leave here, Harry will be wearing the portkey to Black Island at all times. In the highly unlikely event of Dumbledore tracking us down, get yourself out of there. This isn't Voldemort who would murder the rest of us, Dumbledore is fixated on you and will ignore us if you escape."

It was Dan who interrupted Sirius before his children could, "Much as I agree with your plan Sirius, there is one major flaw in it. The

Dursleys will win parents of the year before Harry or Hermione would portkey away and leave us to face Dumbledore. I'm not saying they wouldn't run if the situation demanded it but they would stand and fight before leaving anyone behind."

Sirius could see the truth of that argument though it was Emma who had an alternative suggestion. "That would only work if we all had portkeys we could use in an emergency. They don't need to bring us here, just get us away from where we are."

The group began to thrash this idea around and came up with a workable plan, they would get portkeys made that would drop them all at different parts of a major city where they would make their way to a predetermined rendezvous point. With Hestia, Luna and Ginny, that would be eight portkeys being activated within seconds of one another to all different destinations. That should confuse anyone trying to track the portkeys long enough to allow them time to get a bus, taxi or tram out the area. It wasn't perfect but at least it would provide some degree of protection from an attack, however unlikely that may seem. They had no intention of underestimating Albus Dumbledore.

-oOoOo-

Albus was reading the sensational news splattered from cover to cover over today's Prophet, he'd taken a risk to get his hands on a copy but information was everything to him at the moment.

The information he craved was actually giving him a headache, part of his brain rejoiced at the demise of the dark lord. It recognised the truth of what was printed in the paper. Tom Riddle using Hogwarts founders items to store his horcruxes made perfect sense and as to the goblins having a procedure to destroy them, Albus was embarrassed to admit he never even thought of that solution.

Unfortunately, accepting this as the truth would mean admitting that the great Albus Dumbledore was wrong about so many things. This was something his mind couldn't concede. Albus could only live with the many questionable deeds he'd carried out in his life if he could justify them as being for the greater good. To admit he was mistaken

about these events would lead to him having to re-examine events in his life that he had hidden away in his subconscious. There were events there that the old wizard had no intention of reliving to see if his intentions actually were as light as he'd painted them.

If Albus wasn't wrong then the article had to be lies, simple really. Albus began to chuckle, "Oh Tom, this is sheer genius. It put's you in the clear while painting me as the villain. You really are a worthy opponent but I'll get you in the end."

Even with his deteriorating mental capacity, Albus understood this was going to make it much more difficult to get close enough to the boy to carry out his task. He would have to bide his time and await his opportunity. Reading that Hogwarts was reopening also put a smile on his face. Albus Dumbledore was a wizard who had steps in place for every eventuality and was certain one of those plans would get him the boy.

Once he had done the deed, the wizarding world would soon see how badly they had been deceived. Albus wasn't one to hold grudges though, once they recognised the truth he would forgive them, eventually.

Wizarding Britain though was a changed country, the ministry was becoming efficient and pushing through reform after reform. The revelations about just how much, and for how long, Dumbledore had kept this to himself would totally destroy his reputation. It also forced wizards and witches to face up to their problems and pass laws declaring that never again could one person hold so much power.

The whole story was now there for everyone to read and it shocked them to the core. One they trusted above all others had deceived them and put their children's lives at risk. That another, who'd been imprisoned without trial for a crime he didn't commit, had helped his godson engineer the demise of Voldemort emphasised just how wrong they were.

Changes usually happened very slowly in the wizarding community but the pace of these events left everyone reeling. Pureblood pillars of their society had been proven to be murdering death eaters while

the supposed leader of the light had just been convicted of criminal activities and gross negligence that led to the death of a minor. In all this, only one person stood without reproach. Harry Potter may have been idolised before as the boy who lived, his actions now elevated him even higher in the public's opinion. There was no debate about who the leader of the light was now, Lord Harry James Potter stood unopposed in the minds of the magical community.

His treatment as a baby under the orders of Dumbledore was the final nail in the old wizard's coffin. Should Albus succeed in his quest he would get his wish to never see the inside of Azkaban, the magical public would tear him apart in the street.

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Long haul flights can be mind-numbingly boring, that was never going to be the case on this one. With this being the first time on a plane for Harry, Sirius, Hestia, Luna and Ginny, it became an adventure from the instant they portkeyed into a quiet corner of the airport. With the number of things the groups had to catch-up on, the time flew past. Their seating arrangements were fluid as they swapped regularly, allowing everyone the chance to chat.

Emma and Hestia were chatting excitedly with each other, both ladies were on their way to start new lives in a place they'd only seen pictures of. Setting up home in a different country maybe a daunting task but they both welcomed the challenge for different reasons. Those reasons were all on this plane though.

Sirius was sitting chatting to Dan, more certain than ever that he'd made the right decision. When he'd left Hestia the other day a little doubt had set in that perhaps he'd acted a bit compulsively, the very thing he was trying to fight against. One glance at Hestia in the airport and his doubts vanished quicker than free beer down the pub. When Hestia had said she would come with him to Australia, the elation he had felt was overwhelming. Just her smile in the airport gave him such a good feeling, he was grinning the entire flight. He was forced to face facts, Sirius Black was in love and he didn't care who knew it. This feeling was wonderful.

Harry was also having wonderful thoughts as Luna's laughter washed over him, the musical tone of her laughter was a sound he would never tire of hearing. Their friend had blossomed due to the simple act of having friends, good friends who she could trust to be there for her. Harry and Hermione had long suspected the persona that became loony was part defence mechanism against people who wanted to hurt her but also a way to keep people at arm's length so she couldn't be hurt by them leaving.

This Luna had seized the opportunity of having close friends and was quickly becoming a bright, beautiful young witch that many more people would want to know. She would always have a room in any house the Potters owned and a special place in their hearts, Luna was family. Dobby was posting a letter they'd written to Neville, Harry would have loved for him to be here as well but that wasn't possible at the moment.

Ginny was currently using Hermione like a confessor, the young witch was filled with conflicting emotions and was desperate for Hermione's approval for her actions. She was feeling tremendously guilty that her family was in turmoil yet she was having the time of her life. Her parents had told her it was ok for her to go but it was Hermione's opinion she valued the most. She was babbling without noticing the effect it was having on Hermione.

"Ronnie doesn't appear to mind that she's a girl, she's adapted really well. The only thing that upset her was the thought of never being able to play Quidditch again, she cried for hours about that. Mum said it's the potions that have her taking mood swings. Dad just wanted to talk about my trip, you should have seen his face when I said I would be travelling as a muggle. He gave me some gold to share with Luna and I want to buy a camera so I can show him every bit of it."

Ginny was hardly taking time to breath between sentences. "Ronnie said she was so glad to be leaving Hogwarts, she didn't care if she had to be a girl to do it. She didn't want to end up dangling by her ankles from some tower, we asked her what she meant but Ronnie wouldn't say. The twins told me that's what happened to the Slytherin who tried to attack you and the rest of them were terrified they'd be

next. The rumour is that Harry did it but he wouldn't do something like that, would he?"

Hermione had been dreading this entire conversation but it was unavoidable considering they were going to be staying in the same house. Now Ginny was asking a question she didn't want to lie about, Hermione wasn't sure how to answer though as the last thing they needed was to raise any suspicion. They heard Luna's laughter from the seat in front where she and Harry were catching up, this gave her the opening she needed. "Ginny, what do you think Harry would do if someone attacked Luna?"

Ginny's eyebrows shot up so high they almost disappeared into her hairline, the answer was obvious.

"That Slytherin arranged for us to be ambushed and set about by beater bats. He was never in any danger hanging from that tower but we're pretty certain he'll never try anything like that attack again. We considered the matter closed and were not after anyone else concerned with that attack. I think it is well known where we were when that troll was let into the castle..."

Ginny realised how her question had been construed and apologised at once. "Oh Hermione, I didn't mean anything by that. Everyone knows you were both fighting Voldemort when the troll found Ronnie. I think this might actually make her a better person, she wasn't jealous in the least about me coming on holiday with you. The old Ron would have thrown a tantrum and then moped about it for months."

An improved Ron was not their intention but Hermione figured they would just have to accept the rough with the smooth. This was the beginning of their new life and while everything hadn't worked out as well as it could, they were all here in one piece and Voldemort was gone for good. They had to be happy with that.

Ginny then asked about whether they would be starting school in Australia and Hermione was back on safer ground. They had looked at brochures for two and planned on visiting them before making any decisions. They wouldn't be starting until the New Year at the earliest,

it wasn't as if they would fall behind. Attending another school didn't hold the attraction it once did, they really missed their friends but that was out of their hands at the moment.

-oOoOo-

Petunia waved goodbye to their new friends as they headed off to Muscat for the day, with Vernon feeling under the weather they were giving this excursion a miss. There wasn't actually anything wrong with Vernon and both Dursleys would have loved to be with their friends but they had encountered an unexpected problem. All their food and drink on the ship was free so they never needed cash on board, the excursions were also included but when they left the ship it cost real money for anything they wanted.

This they hadn't factored in to their plans and, on a one hundred and ten day, round the world cruise, these expenses were beginning to add up. Of course they hadn't told their new friends the only reason the Dursleys were on board this luxury liner was that Petunia had won a competition. Their son was in an exclusive private school, Vernon was a company director and, with these slight embellishments, they had been welcomed with open arms by people they had previously only dreamt of mixing with.

Petunia could see it taking years to pay off their mounting credit card debts but neither she nor Vernon cared. Her birthday had been spent at the Captains table, drinking champagne and they would spend Christmas in Australia with New Year being celebrated while cruising the New Zealand fjords. This was the life both felt they deserved, if they were forced to spend the next few years paying for it they would still think it was worth every penny.

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Neville waved goodbye to his gran as he boarded the express with Millie, she had been waiting on the platform for him and he had politely greeted her parents. The pair had no sooner settled into a compartment than the first of many enquiries was made as to whether any of them had heard from the Potters.

Neville answered Susan and Hannah, sure that this would not be the only time he told the story today. "I got an owl from them yesterday. They're fine and were travelling to Australia as muggles so the old man couldn't track them. Both said they would keep in touch but couldn't return to Britain while Dumbledore was still a threat."

They had been joined by the twins as Neville was answering their friends, "Yeah that's right, Ginny and Luna are travelling with them for a holiday."

Fred continued where his brother left off, "They didn't risk entering Britain even to pick them up, Hestia Jones portkeyed the girls to Paris where they were all meeting."

Everyone in that compartment was wishing they were with their friends in Australia, rather on a train to the Scottish Highlands in November.

-oOoOo-

The Toyota eight seater was hired under the name of Wendell Wilkens, just to confuse anyone trying to follow them and because it brought back some good memories. The drive to their new home was over two hours long but with the last half an hour along the coast road, they arrived in high spirits. Those spirits received a major boost as they entered their new home for the first time. This wasn't déjà vu, this house didn't just look familiar, it was an exact copy. Right down to Crookshanks napping on their couch and Hedwig hooting from her perch in the corner, everything they owned in Devon had been moved here.

A rather nervous Dobby popped into the living room and was immediately hugged by Harry with a line forming behind him. "Dobby, this is beyond brilliant. We thought we were going to have to buy all new stuff for here but we can now sleep in our own beds today."

He received a kiss on the forehead from Hermione, "I asked you to bring Crookshanks and Hedwig and you brought the entire contents of our home. Dobby, you are the best!"

It was a blushing Dobby who finally got a word in. "Harry Potter sir, the builders were leaving but I asked the owner to speak to you. I hope that's all right?"

"That's fine Dobby." Harry didn't understand why but he wasn't about to say that to Dobby at the moment. This would save them days of shopping and they were all ready to crash into their own beds. He and Hermione walked outside to see the owner of the building firm looking rather apprehensive. "Lord Potter, I hope you don't mind. I used this build as an opportunity to reward my workers and had them bring their families here for a wee bit of a holiday. When you activate the wards none of us will remember where this house actually is so your safety isn't affected. They stayed in the accommodation I provided, not your new home. I was about to take them down when your elf asked me not to without speaking to you first."

There were two rows of ordinary looking garden sheds tastefully placed amongst the trees of their new back garden, both Potters were at a loss until they had a look inside one. They were like a more permanent version of the wizarding tents both had seen used at the Quidditch World Cup, the couple got what Dobby was suggesting in an instant. They were getting used to the little guy anticipating their needs but this took that whole thing to a new level.

"Sir, I love both my houses and thank you for doing such a fine job. I would also like to purchase these wonderful huts from you as we could make use of them."

"Lord Potter, I had already agreed a price with the people I bought these from. You come anywhere near that with an offer and I'll quite gladly leave them here."

A minute later both shook hands on the deal.

-oOoOo-

Sunday morning breakfast in Hogwarts was progressing normally, Minerva was talking with Remus until the sudden drop in the noise level inside the hall alerted the headmistress that something was happening. That something was the instantly recognisable snowy owl

that was making its way toward Neville Longbottom with every pair of eyes tracking its progress.

She landed on the Gryffindor table in front of Neville and Millie, "Hello girl, I didn't expect you. What have you got there?"

Hedwig held her leg out so the boy could remove her burden, Dobby had released her outside Hagrid's hut so she hadn't exactly flown far. Neither Potter wanted it known that Dobby could appear inside the castle.

Neville opened the thick envelope to find himself staring into a mirror, Millie noticed the small sticker on the back. "It says speak your friend's name."

With the attention of the entire hall on him, Neville said "Harry Potter" before nearly dropping the thing as his reflection was replaced by an image of his friend.

"Hey Neville, glad we caught you at breakfast. It's eight in the evening here."

Neville was struggling for words when Millie came to his rescue, this also allowed her to hold her head very close to Neville's. "Hi Harry, good to hear from you. Glad to see you got there without any trouble."

"Hey Millie, good to hear from you too. Can I assume that just about everyone is trying to listen in?"

Harry was answered by two well known voices, "Hey Potter, we resent that."

"You're right George, we're not trying to listen in. We ARE listening to every word."

"Yea but so far you haven't said anything worth listening to!"

"I'll try to do better guys. Listen Nev, I want to invite you and some others over here to spend Christmas with us."

You could have heard a snowflake falling in the silence following that remark. Before Neville could say anything though, Oliver Wood was at his side and talking into the mirror. "Harry, McGonagall has rescheduled our games until later in the season. We will have to play three games in quick succession but we'd rather do that than play without you."

Harry was really touched at that gesture and delighted to be able to reward his teammates for their loyalty. "Oliver, you and the entire team are invited to spend the Christmas holidays here. Did I mention that it'll be summer and we have our own Quidditch pitch? Oh and of course Penelope is invited as well."

The female squeals of delight were soon identified as the three Gryffindor chasers pushed their captain out the way. "Harry, we love you. We can't kiss the mirror so we'll just have to kiss Neville instead but be ready because when we arrive, you will be receiving the same treatment."

It was hard to tell whose blush was deeper, Neville's or the girl sitting by his side. Millie's change of complexion though wasn't from embarrassment. Harry continued, "Right well of course our Gryffindor year mates are also invited."

This led to more squeals and kisses for Neville from Lavender and Parvati. Even from Australia, Harry could see Millie was about to explode. "Millie, I hope you can come to and keep that boyfriend of yours under control."

That was all the encouragement the girl needed, Neville had the mirror snatched out his hand by Dean seconds before he would have dropped it. Millie had both her arms around him and her lips locked on his, she was claiming Neville as her boyfriend in front of the great hall to much cheering.

Dean's face now appeared in the mirror. "Hi Harry, Neville might be a while and I think you broke the twins, they're just sitting staring at each other with their mouths hanging open."

This had Harry laughing, "Dean, make sure our friends in Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin know they're invited too. Millie looked ready to rip the head off the next person to kiss Neville so I thought I'd better put her out her misery."

"You certainly achieved that, they haven't come up for air yet. It's now pandemonium in here so the professors have more to worry about than two students kissing."

"There will be goblin representatives coming to the school on Thursday to handle all the travel arrangements and get everyone the proper documents. We're doing this the muggle way Dean so you might want to start filling our friends in on what that means."

The boy let out a low whistle, "Harry, this must be costing you a fortune!"

"That's the best bit Dean, it's not. Dumbledore ensured all my previous Christmases were miserable so I'm using his money to fly you all over here so I can enjoy this one. I didn't want his gold but this way we all benefit."

Harry found himself once more talking to Neville, a beaming Neville who had Millie's arm around his shoulder. "Thanks for everything Harry, my girlfriend and I will definitely be there."

Dean had once more to grab the mirror as Millie showed her new boyfriend how much she appreciated that last comment.

"Harry, I think Neville is going to be busy for a little while longer."

"Ok Dean, everyone is going to have to owl home to see if they can come anyway so tell him I'll call at breakfast in a few days. It's great to see you guys again and I hope you can all make it down here for Christmas."

With lots of shouted goodbyes, the mirror was deactivated.

-oOoOo-

Ronda Weasley was lying in her new room in Cairo and thinking it was much nicer than the one she had in Devon. The healer had said that, because of the potions she had to take, Ronnie would be fourteen or fifteen before discovering if her magical core had repaired itself to any degree. All the changes her body would be going through would prevent any regeneration before then. This meant she was going to be home schooled, not in magic but how the new family business operated. Since mum, dad and Bill were all still learning themselves, it should be fun and no homework to worry about. There would also be no bats tied to her wrists while she dangled off a tower or clubs with trolls on the end of them, Ronda Weasley could live with that.

-oOoOo-

There were just too many people involved for the story of the Potters Christmas offer to remain a secret for long. When the story broke, Amelia spoke for the ministry and Hogwarts.

"Yes I can confirm that Lord and Lady Potter have invited their friends to spend the Christmas holidays with them. The children in question will be accompanied by a few Hogwarts professors and a squad of aurors. We don't anticipate any trouble but see no reason not to be prepared just in case."

Albus read this and smiled, he himself had made preparations that would now bear fruit. He intended to arrive on Christmas Eve and expected to complete his task before anyone else had time to react. They would be enjoying their holiday and not expecting a visit from Albus Dumbledore. He was rapidly reaching the stage where he didn't care what happened to him afterward, Tom Riddle could not be allowed to see another Christmas Day. Harry Potter had to die!

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 24

The spirit inside Hogwarts was approaching fever pitch as the trip to Australia had the entire school buzzing. A part of the world that was no more than a blob on a map before suddenly became very interesting to the first year students. The information they could find pointed to the Native Australian Magical culture mostly being swamped by the influx of muggles and wizards escaping poverty and prejudice in their own countries. Australia had developed its own form of magical society, they didn't care about how pure you thought your blood was. People were judged by their actions and deeds, not their ancestry.

The teaching staff were also riding this wave of enthusiasm for learning, everyone was incorporating a little Oz into their lessons. From having the first year's brew simple insect repelling potions to sunscreen charms for the hot Australian summer, all were eagerly absorbed by the willing students.

As Remus and Charity were travelling with the students, they began holding evening classes to explain about airports, planes and in-flight entertainment. These classes were not only heavily attended but very well received, muggle studies had never enjoyed such a high profile inside Hogwarts. If Charity had held these extra classes at this time last year there wouldn't have been three people there, including herself.

Minerva could feel the lift in her school's spirit and the pivotal point was that arrival by Hedwig. She had feared that having the two most popular students forced from the castle could have seen the raft of positive changes since September slip back to the old bigoted ways, Minerva was delighted that this proved not to be the case. She had also received a note from the Potters, personally inviting her to spend Christmas with them and the rest of their friends. She had completed the forms requested by the goblin delegation who dealt with all the students as well, she still hadn't decided whether she would travel or not.

Minerva wasn't convinced leaving Hogwarts for two weeks was a good idea and there was the other consideration to take into account.

The children were all eagerly anticipating their holiday in Australia, having the headmistress along might just put a damper on their experience.

The laughter emanating from the Gryffindor table caused her eyes to track there automatically, quickly discovering the source. Harry was obviously talking to his friends again using that wonderful mirror. After ten minutes or so, students from that table moved to talk with friends from the other house tables. Within minutes, Minerva had a large, multi-house delegation facing her in front of the staff table. Minerva couldn't help but think this was a sign of how much Hogwarts had changed, there were students from every house and Mr Longbottom was the spokesperson.

"Headmistress McGonagall, Harry has told us you have yet to decide whether you will be travelling to Australia with us, he and Hermione asked us to help you make up your mind."

Miss Bones spoke next, "Headmistress, without your support, most of what we've achieved this year wouldn't have happened. We really do want you to come with us."

Millie chipped in her two knut's worth, "Besides headmistress, who else can make the Weasley twins behave? I'm not nervous about getting on a plane and flying half way around the world. Two weeks with Fred and George terrifies me." This drew a lot of laughter as Millie feigned fear as the twins pretended to be hurt by her remark.

Minerva was touched by their genuine concern for her, she couldn't imagine them doing this for Albus. They were all waiting patiently on her saying something, "Mr Longbottom, the next time you are speaking to Mr or Mrs Potter, tell them I'll be there!"

The cheering only stopped when the warning bell sounded, informing the students it was time to head toward their first lesson of the day. It was a happy bunch of students who made their way out the great hall.

Draco had studied the entire incident while sitting by himself, even Vin and Greg had distanced themselves from him now. Watching Pansy be part of that group was hard for the blond Slytherin to take.

As Pansy was spending Christmas in Australia, he was going to be stuck alone inside this castle.

His letter to the Tonks had less than stellar results. Andromeda Tonks may be a pureblood by birth but her reply to his letter contained none of the niceties Draco had expected. It was brutally blunt and left no room for any ambiguity. The Tonks had already raised a child and were in no hurry to repeat the experience, especially with a boy who'd been raised since birth to despise them. There was also the serious issue of him not having a family name. Since the Tonks were now affiliated to the Blacks, Draco would need to see the head of that family before he could be admitted to theirs. There was more chance of Draco piloting the muggle machine that was taking them all to Australia than Sirius Black doing him any favours.

While Crabbe and Goyle could at least return home to their mothers for Christmas, Draco had only a half-hearted promise that his 'aunt' would try to meet him for a chat one afternoon during the holidays. While the rest of the first years were enjoying Australian blue sky, that was the only bright spot on Draco No-Name's horizon.

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Harry had just finished talking with Neville on the mirror when he noticed Luna was upset about something. He sat beside her on the sofa and put his arm comfortingly around her shoulders. "What's the matter Luna? Feeling homesick?"

"Oh no Harry, I love it here. I'm just worried that Dumbledore will find you because of everyone coming here for Christmas."

Harry tried to reassure their friend, "Luna, everyone knew we were building another home in Australia, where else would we go? What you need to remember is that Australia is over thirty times the size of Britain with less than a third of the population. This is a very big country. Without specific information they will never find us and the only people outside this room who know where we live are the goblins. All anyone in Hogwarts knows is that they're coming to Australia and they won't know anymore until they're in the airport.

Tonks is picking up all the travel documents from Gringotts and meeting the group at the airport."

Luna wasn't convinced, "What about when they go back to Britain? All it takes is for one person to let something slip..."

Hermione sat on Luna's other side and also wrapped her arm around the little blond. "The wards around this house are pretty special. When our friends leave here, they will remember everything about this holiday except where this house is. They could walk right past and not know we were here. The wards will be altered to allow them entrance only for the period of the holidays. The people who built this house couldn't even find it again."

She was beginning to understand, "So they will remember they had a brilliant time but not where they spent it?"

Harry smiled at her, "Oh, they'll remember they spent their time in Australia at the Potters, they'll remember the house and the grounds but they won't be able to find it again or tell anyone else how to. I just love magic!"

Luna had another thought that scared her, "So when I leave here to go home, I won't be able to find this house again?"

Harry's smile never wavered, "Luna, you're considered family. You will always be able to find us and always be welcome."

Luna was determined not to cry at that, "It sounds as if Christmas is going to be a lot of fun. I'm sorry I'm going home now but I couldn't leave my dad to spend the holidays alone."

He was still smiling as he revealed her surprise. "Luna, you won't be going back to Britain for Christmas and your dad won't be alone. He's flying out with the Hogwarts mob to spend the holidays here with us."

Luna couldn't help it, the tears came as she managed to hug both of them at the same time. Harry's comment about family had started her filling up, flying her father over here just overloaded the dam. "I don't know how to thank you."

It was Harry's turn to be amazed, "You'll never have to Luna. You're our best friend, that's thanks enough for us."

Ginny was sitting sniffing as well, "I'll get to spend Christmas with you guys and the twins, that's brilliant!"

Hermione decided to raise the mood, "Ok girls, our mission is to ensure my husband here has the best Christmas ever."

Harry shook his head, "Girls, sitting with you three beside the pool today and that lovely dinner Dobby made means today is already better than any Christmas I can remember. This year's being my best is already a given. I have a beautiful wife, wonderful friends, parents and my godfather, it can't get any better than that."

Hermione leaned over Luna and whispered in his ear. Harry's jaw dropped open, his face flushed while his eyes developed a thousand yards stare.

Ginny was now giggling, "I don't know what you said to him Hermione but I think you broke your husband."

It was a smiling Luna who answered, having heard what Hermione whispered to him. "She told him that in a few years they would have children of their own and then Christmas would be really special."

The adults were sitting quietly listening and now wished they hadn't. Even Hestia was fighting back the tears at those last few comments, all silently swore to make this the best Christmas ever.

Sirius was amazed at how deeply Hermione's comment had resonated within him, he regarded his life as being better now than it had ever been. The only thing he could think of that could make it any better would be having children of his own, he was also sure he'd found the person he wanted to have them with. He wasn't sure whether it was his extensive stay in Azkaban or simply that he was that bit older but that thought didn't scare him in the slightest. The idea of becoming a father was one that used to terrify him and had to

be avoided at all costs, now he remembered how it felt to hold baby Harry as Prong asked if he would be godfather to his son.

The idea of getting married to Hestia filled his entire being with joy, it was now a question of timing and whether they needed more room on that plane. It may require a talk with Emma to see if they could accommodate more people staying over the holidays, getting married at that time on this beautiful property was suddenly very appealing. Asking Hestia seemed like the best idea in the world, it was just a case of how to go about it. He was after all Sirius Black, there had to be a touch of drama in there somewhere to make it memorable.

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Hestia had picked-up on the change in her man very quickly, she could think of no reason for this change though. She climbed into bed beside him and rested her head on his bare chest. Sirius immediately had his arm around her and holding her close but still not speaking. This quietness was so alien to his character that it had her worried. It was time to ask, "Sirius love, I don't know what's going on in that head of yours but you're scaring me here."

Sirius lifted her face carefully toward his and gently kissed her on the lips. "Sorry honey, that's the last thing I want to do. I've been wondering about something and I guess the only way to find the answer is to ask the question. Do you think us getting married here at Christmas would be too soon?"

Hestia locked her lips on his while sliding on top of her man, it was quite a while before any meaningful conversation was heard or needed.

A very happy and sated Sirius was the one who finally spoke. "I take it that was a yes? This will be a hell of a story to tell our kids when they ask you - how did daddy propose mummy?"

That 'mummy' comment nearly earned Sirius another round before the practical side of Hestia's brain managed to get a word in and the reality of his proposal hit home. "Sirius, I need to get my family over here, I haven't a dress or bridesmaid and ..."

Sirius stopped her panic by gently kissing her again. "Harry's idea of using the old coot's gold to do some good appeals to me. We'll put it toward giving you the wedding of your dreams, anything you want is yours. I think we should fly your parents out early and then the wedding guests with the Hogwarts crowd. Your mum and Emma can help you with the organisation and us men will stay out your way and agree with anything and everything you say."

Hestia kissed the top of his nose, "What am I going to do with you?"

"Well, since you've already agreed to marry me, I vote for a repeat of what you did earlier. That, my future wife, was bloody amazing!"

This had both of them giggling but the twinkling in Hestia's beautiful eyes told him he was going to get his wish, all of them. For Hestia, having children with Sirius was her deepest desire. Practicing the making of them was pretty up-there as well.

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The following morning Sirius called his fellow marauder on their set of mirrors, it would be after seven p.m. in Scotland but that should be fine. He couldn't help but smile in greeting at the sight of his best friend, since Hestia entered his life he'd found himself smiling rather a lot.

"Hey Moony, I need you to do me a favour."

When Remus heard the details, he was only too pleased to agree. He also couldn't help but think of the person Sirius had said he could share this secret with. His best friend's news had set his own thoughts off in the same direction. He was a Hogwarts professor now that had found a special someone who accepted him for the man he was. Warts and all or should that be wolf and all? It was time to call on his Gryffindor courage. "Lord Black, I formally seek your permission to ask for a member of your house's hand in marriage."

Sirius was desperate to let out a loud whoop of delight but was forced to answer formally since that was the way Remus had phrased his

request. "I, Lord Black will happily give my permission but with one proviso. This condition is non-negotiable."

Remus was now really worried, he would do anything for the right to marry Tonks and couldn't believe his friend was doing this to him. He nodded his head in agreement and waited on the bad news. He could only hope Padfoot wouldn't have him running around Hogwarts naked or some prank that was even worse. With Sirius, you just never knew.

"I want you to ask Lord Harry James Potter to be your son or daughter's godfather when your first child is born. You must also swear to never tell him we had this conversation."

Moony had braced himself for the axe falling and was looking for the hidden pain in Padfoot's request. "Is that it?"

"Of course that's it. What were you expecting, public nudity?"

Both simultaneously burst out laughing at opportunities lost and bullets dodged. It was Sirius who recovered first. "Naw, I couldn't do anything like that. Tonks and Hestia would kill me. So what is your answer?"

"I'm all in favour of it but obviously I can't answer for the both of us. Can I ask why?"

"I want to give those two some experience before they dive into having little ones of their own. They will be godparents to any Black children and I can't think of anyone better suited to the roles."

The more Remus thought about it, the more he liked the idea and agreed with Sirius. He couldn't think of anyone better either. He was a few conversations away from asking his girlfriend about godparents to any children they might have. Sirius then came back with an offer that had Remus reeling.

"Moony, most of the people needed for your wedding will already be here for the holidays. When Tonks says yes, tell her there's an option of making this a double ceremony. The girls will have the mirrors to make any arrangements they need and money is no problem. I was

going to ask you to be my best man but Harry could fill that role for both of us."

Remus tried to object that he wouldn't take charity until Sirius told him where the money was coming from and pointed out he got a raw deal that Halloween too. The truth of his friend's words killed any arguments and anyone who Remus was going to invite would already be in Australia. It was a certainty that Sirius would be inviting Andromeda and Ted and with Hestia having the same group of friends as Tonks, most of them were going to be there too. It really did make sense from all the angles except the most important ones. Tonks had still to say yes and then not think it was too soon.

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The eight made it a point to all get together for breakfast. With the Potters searching for a new school in Australia, preparations for the arrival of the Hogwarts contingent and now a wedding too, this meant that everyone's schedules were unpredictable. Breakfast was the one time of the day when they could all be together and they looked forward to it.

Sirius got a mirror call while buttering his toast, he found an exuberant Moony on the other end.

"She said yes to everything!"

Sirius never got to say another word as, with a squeal of delight, Hestia had the mirror out his hand in a flash. Tonks must have done the same to Remus because both witches were now talking a mile a minute to each other.

Sirius turned to his godson, "Harry, will you be my best man at our wedding?"

This caught Harry out, what was going on here? "What about Remus?"

"Oh he wants you to be his best man as well. We're now holding a double wedding as Tonks apparently said yes!"

Hermione had Harry wrapped in a hug before he could answer, this was better than they could ever have hoped for. Not only were Teddy's parents getting married but Sirius was too.

Emma Granger was ecstatic, project Teddy was not just bearing fruit, they could end up with a whole crop of new marauders.

Hestia interrupted all their thoughts, "Hermione, both Tonks and I would like you to be our maid of honour. Will you please?"

Hermione knew how much this meant to her husband, both these men had been father figures to him and been cruelly snatched away. The thought of her and Harry standing beside both of them as they got married had her tearing up. "That really is an honour, are you sure you want me?"

"Oh yes, neither Tonks nor me are the type to have fourteen bridesmaids. I had originally intended to ask her but this is even better as she'll be standing next to me too. You and Harry are people we admire, respect and think of as family already. This would mean a lot to all of us."

Both Potters agreed, this led to more squeals from around the table and even Tonks could be heard from Britain. Harry then introduced the only sour note of the morning. "Please don't tell me I have to make two best man speeches?"

The laughter this was greeted with was due more to Harry's look of abject horror than the actual comment itself.

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The four kids were making their way along the path that led to the beach, yes they had a fabulous pool at home but it didn't have waves. Harry was determined to master riding the waves before all their friends arrived from Hogwarts, the girls just enjoyed watching Harry wipe out.

Luna asked about their visit yesterday, "You've been very quiet about your trip to look over the Victoria, was the school that bad?"

Hermione quickly answered, "Oh no Luna, the school was really nice. We got to meet loads of the professors and some of the students who would be our classmates. The whole thing just felt strange and I hate the thought of starting all over again. They didn't give two hoots that we were a lord and lady which was good but the whole boy who lived thing is rife even down here. That and the fact we're married had them staring at us like bugs under a microscope. In Hogwarts all our friends see us as just Harry and Hermione."

Ginny may have been thinking it but of course it was Luna who said it. "Guys, don't take this the wrong way but you could never be just Harry and Hermione. You know I don't buy into that other rubbish but you two are special people even without any of that. You stand up for what you believe in and are ready to fight to defend those beliefs if need be. You chose your friends by no other means than them being people you like. Best of all, you don't realise just how special that makes you."

Ginny had to agree, "You didn't judge me by the actions of my family but gave me a chance to get to know you because Luna was my friend. I can't tell you how special that makes you to me."

Luna was nodding enthusiastically, "You make people want to change for the better just by being yourselves, if that isn't special then I don't know what is!"

Harry was flabbergasted at those remarks but Hermione understood. While she didn't consider herself to be special, she had no problem considering her husband as such. "It wasn't just being stared at though, the actual facility was excellent but it's the people who make the school. Enrol all our friends there and I would have talked your ears off all night about how good the Victoria was. I really miss Monday nights with all our friends in our room, Quidditch practice where the chasers and beaters compete to see who can make Harry blush the most, defence lessons with Remus and Tonks, watching Neville and Millie getting together and I really hate the idea of not seeing you guys every weekend."

Luna grabbed Harry by the arm and began to drag him away, "This is too heavy and depressing for a sunny Saturday morning with a beach less than five minutes away. Lets all head down there and Harry will entertain us with his attempts to swallow half the ocean."

Harry was manfully attempting to ignore the laughter coming from the three girls, he concentrated his mind on staying on that bloody board. Surfing shouldn't be this hard?

Harry was correct though totally unaware his lovely wife had jinxed his board to throw him off when he least expected it. Hermione decided to leave the jinx there for another week at least. Once Harry mastered surfing, there would be no more quiet days spent relaxing by the pool. Hermione also found herself agreeing with something Sirius said, the best pranks were the ones that didn't seem like a prank at all. Of course, that only held true if you didn't get caught but it was just so funny to watch Harry come tumbling off the board. She was certainly making sure that this Hermione wasn't a learning obsessed bookworm and made time to have some fun.

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Sirius had arranged for a small private room at a very exclusive restaurant and was currently a worried man. Hestia had of course picked-up on this but surmised correctly that her future husband was about to perform a proposal they could tell their children about. Hestia had insisted on this but had no idea how far Sirius intended to take her request. The now ever-present mirror went off in Hestia's bag, she answered it to find a mischievous looking Tonks grinning back at her. "Tonks, this is not a good time right now. Can I call you back later?"

"Well hello to you too Hestia. It's actually Sirius I need to speak with for a second."

She handed the mirror over the table before taking a sip of the superb wine, her future husband's next words almost caused Hestia to choke on it.

"Good morning Mr and Mrs Jones, sorry about this interruption to your breakfast but it is fairly important. Let me introduce myself, I am Lord Sirius Orion Black and am calling to ask for permission to marry your beautiful daughter who I love more than life. Again I apologise that we're meeting this way but it would be my intention to get you down here so we can get to know one another before the big day."

Robert Jones looked into this man's eyes and could see the love of his daughter reflected there, it only remained to discover how she felt about this. He was already pretty sure of that or he wouldn't have let her travel half way around the world. "Lord Black, may I speak with my daughter a moment before I answer your question."

"Of course sir." He handed the mirror to his intended.

"Daddy?"

"Yes love, it's me. I've been asked for your hand in marriage and need to know how you feel about this?"

Hestia took a steadying breath before answering, "Daddy, I want this more than anything in the whole world. Sirius is the one for me and I love him."

That was all he needed to hear, Hestia could also hear her mother crying buckets in the background before she passed the mirror back to Sirius.

"Lord Black, I gladly give my permission for you to ask for my daughter's hand."

Sirius cast a quick charm on the mirror that saw it floating at an angle that gave the viewers back in Britain a front row seat to what he was about to do. He got down on one knee beside the woman he wanted to marry. "Hestia, you make me happier than I've ever been just by walking into the room. I couldn't bear not to have you in my life for as long as we both shall live. I love you and hope you will do me the honour of becoming my wife?" Sirius opened a black velvet box to show her an exquisite diamond ring.

Her voice betrayed Hestia and she could only squeak 'yes'. Sirius placed the ring on her finger to much cheering from the floating mirror. The kiss that followed was quite chaste as both were aware of the audience they had.

The Jones's quickly agreed to travel to Australia though Robert did balk at the idea of flying as a muggle, he soon relented as the situation was explained to him. Robert thought it was the least he could do to keep 'the boy who saved them all' safe from Dumbledore. Andi and Ted would be travelling with them as Tonks was sticking with the original plan to travel with Remus and the Hogwarts crowd.

Tonks trusted their mothers, Hestia and Emma to have everything organised by the time she got there and there was always the mirrors for anything they needed to check. She would be content with that. All she needed to make her wedding day perfect was for Remus to turn up.

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Robert and Carol Jones soon proved to be welcome additions to the house in Australia as they, along with Ted and Andi threw themselves wholeheartedly into the madness that Christmas was fast becoming. Both couples were staying in the main house despite Sirius offering the spare bedroom in their flat over the garages. There was a collective decision to reserve that room for Tonks and Remus. Since both would be here on what was effectively a working holiday, they wouldn't be able to have a conventional honeymoon. Sirius and Hestia would wait until everyone headed back to Britain before leaving to spend some alone time on Black Island, the Lupins would be offered its use for a few weeks during their summer break.

That left two bedrooms in the main house, earmarked for Xeno Lovegood and Minerva McGonagall. None of them were quite brave enough to ask the formidable headmistress of Hogwarts to sleep in a hut, no matter how luxurious they could make them.

With Ted here, they had not only a guest with a muggle background but another driver as well. Tonks had told them that every lucky auror who had managed to get themselves on the plane as part of the

protection detail all had muggle backgrounds. Four of them had licences and with Tonks, her father, Dan and Emma it gave them quite a driver pool. They were hiring a fleet of Toyota eight seaters for the duration of the holidays.

Both Ted and Robert were drafted into the planning team for the other big event of the holidays, the arrival of the Hogwarts students. The four ladies would be organising the wedding while their other half's would be working with the four kids to ensure their friends had the time of their young lives. Dan was aiming for a real mixture, staying in magical accommodation but eating food outside on picnic benches. Food being barbecued or cooked over an open fire. Dan was drawing on his childhood experiences camping with the boy scouts. Everyone loved the ideas and added bits of their own, the plans were slowly cemented but the name was already cast in stone. The Hogwarts contingent would all be staying in camp Granger.

With the pool, Quidditch pitch, extensive grounds and the nearby beach, the idea was to spend alternate days on excursions. Even shopping and a hamburger or pizza was cause for excitement when you were doing it in the company of your friends. Sirius then chucked-in what was bound to be the highlight of their holiday. A day on a hired pirate ship that would take them all sailing for a day in search of dolphin sightings. With a double wedding now taking place on Boxing day, it was a varied and packed program that hopefully would contain something for everyone.

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At the final get-together before they left for Australia, Remus was leading the meeting for those who were travelling in two days' time. Ginny had a batch of pictures that she was sending on to her parents but Remus had asked permission from the twins to show some of them to the group. A quick spell copied them before he transformed the pictures into slides, the ancient projector cast the coloured muggle images onto the wall.

The huts were now all brightly painted and had picnic benches outside, when the pictures showed the interiors then everyone was ready to leave right there and then. The house in its beautiful gardens

was stunning but their friends at the pool took their breath away. By the time the beach photo's showed a bronzed Harry and a bikini wearing Hermione on their surf boards, they were ready to fly there by broom.

Hogwarts in December averaged less than eight hours of daylight per day with sunshine being nothing more than a distant pleasant memory. The thought of blue skies, beaches and bikinis had everyone even more excited. They would not be travelling by the Hogwarts express, they would be leaving shortly after their last class toward the Three Broomsticks floo. A muggle coach would once again be waiting on them outside the Leaky Cauldron to take them off to the airport. Just when they thought it was impossible to be any more excited, Remus managed to ratchet it up a notch.

"As you can see, Harry and Hermione have done their best to ensure that we all have a fabulous time. There is one additional event that I have still to tell you about, on Boxing Day everyone is invited to a wedding held on the grounds of the Potter / Granger home."

This drew Minerva's attention, pirate ships may be great for the youngsters but a good wedding was more her cup of tea. Even if she didn't know the participants too well, the occasion in itself almost always brought a tear to her eyes.

Remus had everyone's undivided attention now as they waited for more details, "Lord Sirius Black will be marrying Miss Hestia Jones." This led to cheers as nearly all of them had met Sirius. Minerva was delighted that her former cub was finally settling down. Remus just loved playing the crowd and was milking this for all it was worth. "To make the occasion even more special, it will be a double wedding. The delectable Miss Tonks here has amazingly agreed to be my wife and we will marry at the same time."

The cheering this time raised the roof. The first years loved Remus and Tonks while the twins were going to be at both their idol's weddings. Minerva was now certain she would be crying her eyes out as two of Gryffindor's former cubs had apparently found the happiness they deserved. The ring on Miss Tonks finger was now

clearly visible for all to see as she wrapped her arms around Remus and gave him a chaste kiss.

They filed out of the meeting in great spirits, only two more nights and then they would be off on their adventure of a lifetime. Neville noticed his girlfriend was rather subdued as he walked her back to the Slytherin dorm. "Something bothering you Millie?"

When Millie started blushing and acting all shy Neville knew this was serious, his girlfriend just wasn't like that. "I'm just worried you'll be disappointed in me Neville. Hermione was beautiful in that bikini, I look nothing like that!"

Neville smiled shyly back at her, "Well since I look nothing like Harry in my trunks, I think we should be ok. You may not believe this but, whatever you are wearing at the pool or on that beach, my eyes won't be looking anywhere else. My main worries are that you'll either be disappointed when you see me in my trunks or slap my face for drooling all over the sight of you in your swimwear."

The shy and blushing girl disappeared as his Millie made an immediate return. Her first action was to drag her wonderful, caring boyfriend into the nearest broom cupboard.

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The twins were sending Ginny's photographs to Charlie, he would then take them to Cairo for Christmas where their dad would flip at the sight of them. The muggle glossy colour prints showed Ginny having the time of her life and the twins couldn't wait to join her. They also couldn't wait to tease Oliver when he returned from his prefect rounds with a certain Miss Clearwater. Oliver had been practically hyperventilating at the meeting and the twins were determined to discover why. The betting was pretty even between the thought of Penelope in a bikini like Hermione's and the picture of them playing Quidditch in the sunshine. Either way, he was soon going to be teased mercilessly by the rest of the team.

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Dumbledore's plans were almost complete, he would spend the next twenty-four hours meditating in preparation for his final battle. He still expected to kill the boy quickly but complacency could cost him his life and see the dark lord triumph, something Albus could not allow.

Once again the old wizard congratulated himself on having the foresight to place tracking charms on all the first year Gryffindor's trunks, inviting all his friends to his hidden home was foolishness taken to the extreme. Tom always did think he was smarter than everyone else, Albus had every intention of showing Riddle how wrong he was.

Dumbledore had used ancient magic and his great power to construct a portkey that should blast through any and all wards, it had taken weeks and left him very tired but the result would more than justify all the effort. The trunks would take him directly to the dark lord's unknowing recruits, the boy would be close by.

Unlike Tom, it wasn't fear but Surprise that was Dumbledore's greatest weapon. He needed to kill the boy quickly or there would be a battle to end all battles. Dumbledore against Voldemort with the only rule being whoever remained alive at the end would be remembered by history as the victor. Albus intended that to be him, nothing else mattered.

Thanks for reading.

Final Chapter – Part One

Minerva McGonagall was renowned as a witch who was not easily impressed. Minerva McGonagall was currently calling on all her considerable experience of dealing with difficult parents and wayward students to stop her jaw hitting the floor and drool running down the side of her mouth. Astonishment, amazement and awe combined didn't come close to how she was feeling at the moment. For the first time in her life Minerva appreciated how parents of muggle borns felt upon hearing that magic was not only a reality but their child was a witch or wizard. Minerva was so far beyond what she considered normal that she had no frame of reference to compare it with. Thankfully for her state of mind, the shocks had built up until her present circumstances, this was the only reason the stern headmistress was able to project the appearance of coping with the situation.

Her eyebrows had first been raised when they left the Leaky Cauldron, the muggle coach was certainly eye opening. What was even more impressive though was how the children just accepted this as the norm, the few who hadn't been on the theme park outing were soon settled in as their friends looked after them. Watching while Charity used a device that allowed her to speak to everyone on the coach reinforced Minerva's belief that she'd made the correct decision by travelling with this group. She had no intention of becoming an unapproachable figure like Dumbledore and there was clearly much to be learned on this adventure. It was only old dogs that couldn't be taught new tricks, felines were a whole other matter.

Heathrow Airport was mind boggling. You could fit Hogwarts, the ministry and probably Diagon Alley too inside the massive building. Young Mr Thomas was something of an aviation buff and Minerva was hearing facts her mind was having trouble accepting. This was apparently only one of the terminal buildings the airport boasted and in excess of thirty million people passed through Heathrow annually. The organisation required transporting that many people and their belongings between destinations as far apart as Aberdeen and Adelaide was too much for the administrator in Minerva to comprehend. She knew how difficult it was to run Hogwarts, the enormous scale of this operation staggered her.

When Auror Tonks appeared with their documents, including completed tags for their luggage, Mr Thomas went into absolute raptures about some business class they would be taking. Minerva had never seen a child so excited about learning. Their luggage shortly disappeared into a hole in the wall and they were all led through to a very nice lounge, complete with free drinks and snacks as they awaited their departure time.

Minerva was currently relaxing on a very comfortable seat, a seat that could change positions at the push of a button, while a young lady served her tea and biscuits. There was no sensation of being over a mile high and travelling at a speed no broom could ever hope to match. There were moving pictures displayed with sound being accessed by placing small items in your ear, she had lighting and temperature controls at her fingertips and not one bit of magic had been used anywhere. Minerva was having the absolute folly of ignoring this world undeniably driven home, anyone who thought the magical world couldn't learn anything from muggles must be mistaking their beer for befuddlement draught.

Observing as her students coped admirably with these astonishing surroundings filled the headmistress with pride. Not so much at any achievement of hers, more how the children of muggle backgrounds all helped their friends enjoy the whole experience. Minerva's gaze was drawn to three girls sitting together with the things in their ears, heads swaying in time as they obviously listened to music. That this was Miss Greengrass, Miss Davis and Miss Parkinson, Slytherin purebloods all, was almost beyond comprehension.

Something about them listening to music triggered a long forgotten memory from her childhood, playing at her best friend's house. Morag's mother had a wind-up gramophone that they played all the time, one of the songs they used to listen to repeatedly now fired off in her mind. 'How ya gonna keep 'em down on the farm, after they've seen Paree' was nothing more than a catchy tune to the two little girls. For the adult Minerva McGonagall, this was the inspiration behind her epiphany that could actually change the magical community of Britain. She had later understood the lyrics were aimed at American soldiers who had fought against the Kaiser, hinting that after seeing the bright

lights of Paris they wouldn't be content with returning to farming. Minerva had no problems drawing parallels with the current situation, she would bet her salary and pension those three girls weren't listening to Celestina Warbeck.

Her friend Filius was right, the Potters had shown them all the way forward. Expose the lies and explode the myths, leave the blood bigotry with no place to hide. The children on this plane were undeniable proof of what could be achieved when everyone worked together. As headmistress of Hogwarts, Minerva considered it as her job, if not her duty to prepare the children entrusted to her care for the challenges they would face in the real world. With Cornelius and Amelia making sweeping changes at the ministry, now was the time for Hogwarts to do the same.

There was Qantas stationary available in a pouch at her seat so Minerva started to write down her ideas for change, ideas that would have been considered crazy even six months ago. Then again, if six months ago someone had told her she'd be writing these ideas while flying over the Himalayas at six hundred miles per hour without spilling her tea, Minerva would have assumed they'd been at the cooking sherry. If she wasn't surrounded by Hogwarts students, she might have requested something stronger than a cup of tea herself. A wee dram would certainly hit the spot right about now.

-oOoOo-

The Grangers were watching the multiple reunions taking place in the airport though, with the amount of noise being generated, they were far from the only ones paying attention. Luna had her arms locked around her father while Ginny was being repeatedly hoisted in the air by her twin brothers. Remus and Tonks were also making some noise as they greeted their friends and future family but the commotion around Harry and Hermione easily drowned the rest out. It was when three older girls were shrieking and making a large show of kissing Harry thank you on his cheeks that Emma appeared ready to intervene, she was only prevented from doing so by Minerva's quiet words in her ear.

"Mrs Granger, those three girls are Harry's team mates. They are only teasing him in an attempt to make him blush, both Harry and Hermione are well aware of this fact and either could stop this in an instant."

Minerva's words were born out as Hermione was now laughing rather loudly as the twins were jokingly trying to kiss him as well.

"The Gryffindor team is a really close unit this year, they are also very protective of the youngest quidditch seeker in over a century. This entire squad of children behaves more like a family than a group of friends and I can't thank your children enough for initiating it. They have been the catalysts for so much that is good this year, it breaks my heart to think they may not return because a crazy old man is after them." Minerva saw Dan and Emma about to strongly object so she headed them off, "Mr and Mrs Granger, I understand totally why you did what you did and agree with your decision one hundred percent. Doesn't mean I have to like it though."

Her smile disarmed the parents, both knew their children were of the same opinion. "I think you need to call us Dan and Emma, we are going to be staying in the same house for the next two weeks."

The finally got everyone loaded into the fleet of Toyotas they had hired and the convoy headed for home. It was now evening in Australia and they still had a two-hour drive ahead of them. Dobby would have food waiting for the group when they arrived. A quick tour of the accommodation and then it would be off to bed for some much needed sleep, the fun could begin tomorrow. Harry had come to an agreement with the little guy, Dobby would only provide one meal a day during the holidays. The Potters were well aware of the elf's willingness to work himself into a state of collapse and hoped this would prevent him overworking. Only the fact that he was still going to be cooking Christmas dinner and catering for the wedding had Dobby agreeing, it didn't sit well that someone else would be doing the cooking at other times but he had to admit that these two weeks were going to be very busy. Dobby had never been happier.

The party arrived home to be greeted by thousands of twinkling festive lights strung all over Camp Granger. As much as Sirius

wanted to, the rest of the family had drawn the line at items like illuminated and animated Santa in a hot air balloon. One shop managed to go too far even for Sirius, the life-sized plastic figure of Santa with his trousers at his ankles while taking a dump down a chimney had the outraged marauder reaching for his wand. Only Hestia's quick actions had saved them from becoming embroiled in an incident that would have taken some explaining.

"But love, imagine a kid seeing that. Imagine our kid seeing that, that shopkeeper deserved to be hexed."

No one disagreed with the thought behind his objection, it was only the method Sirius chose to vent those objections that they had to curtail. Hestia was so pleased at the thought of 'our kid' that she raised no objections when her fiancé bought enough fake reindeer to start his own herd. They were placed tastefully in groups around the camp. Each hut also had its own Christmas tree for its occupants to trim, decorations would be purchased on their first shopping day.

Tomorrow was an acclimatisation day, they would lounge about while making use of the camps many facilities, giving them all a chance to recover from the long haul flight. The dozen friends of Tonks and Hestia were sharing three huts along with Charity and the aurors.

The food and drink was laid out as a buffet and people helped themselves while milling around and discovering their home for the next fortnight. No one was disappointed that they would be staying in camp tomorrow, the news was actually greeted with enthusiasm. Oliver took it a step too far though when he called a Gryffindor Quidditch practice for the afternoon, thankfully Penelope was able to move from his side quickly enough to avoid the food thrown at her boyfriend. Although they vocally voiced their objection, the other six players were looking forward to doing some flying in the sunshine.

-oOoOo-

Dan and Ted were slaving over a massive hot grill and loving every minute of it. They had regiments of sausages, acres of bacon and eggs frying by the dozen. A large cauldron of beans was suspended over a camp fire and Sirius had even transfigured a tubular metal

triangle for Dan to hit while shouting 'come and get it!' The fact that most people were already up and in the queue for food didn't lessen his enjoyment of the dingala..dingala..ding one iota. Sirius and Remus were on tea, coffee, fruit juice duty while Robert had bread rolls, butter and jams on every table. Before the party left from Hogwarts, the mercury had barely risen above zero degrees Celsius for a fortnight. Add in the wind chill factor and you got the usual weather report for the Scottish Highlands in December, bloody freezing.

Eating breakfast al fresco in the beautiful Australian sunshine was an instant hit amongst the very happy campers. Lunch would consist of a mountain of sandwiches that the ladies would prepare and of course there was fruit in abundance at every meal. This would allow Dobby time to make their evening meal.

Although the youngest, Ginny found herself showing the older bunch around. Fred and George had asked for a tour with their Quidditch team mates and Penelope tagging along. Luna was doing the same with her father, she'd missed him so much and planned on spending the entire day by his side.

The adults were all going over wedding plans while the aurors, minus Tonks of course, were checking the perimeter inside the wards to get a better understanding of the place .Harry and Hermione were catching up with their friends as they all walked down the path to the private beach, with the Quidditch practice this afternoon Harry wanted to spend the morning just hanging out and having a few laughs. Everyone was just in shorts and t-shirts, more concerned with getting their bearings than a tan at the moment.

Millie was watching the waves and reassessing her decision to give surfing a try, "Is surfing really hard to learn Harry?"

"Well that depends on whether the board you're using is jinxed or not Millie."

This led to multiple cries of 'what' while Hermione's complexion became more like a Scottish tomato than English rose. "How..when...why?"

Harry smiled at his wife. He'd been so happy that she'd actually attempted a prank, Harry had actually fell off his board a few times on purpose. "When the board started moving against the flow I soon figured it out, you seemed so happy to think you got away with a prank I didn't want to spoil it for you."

This earned Harry a loving kiss from his wife as Neville let out a theatrical sigh. "Ok, let me see if I've got this right. Hermione pranks Harry, Harry knows she's doing it but says nothing and plays along, this earns him a grade one snog? How in Merlin's name are we ever supposed to understand girls?"

Hermione had her head on Harry's chest while wrapped in his arms as she answered, "You're not supposed to understand us Neville, we don't understand ourselves half the time!"

Lavender pretended to be angry, "Hermione, you're not supposed to tell the boys our secrets."

Justin just laughed, "Don't worry Lavender, I didn't understand a word of that."

It was Dan who needed to be restrained that afternoon, watching Oliver shout encouragement to the twins firing cannonballs at his son was not the dentist's idea of fun.

It was his daughter's hand that gripped his arm, "Dad, it's part of the game. They train like this so those things don't get near him in a real match. Harry's the most natural flier I've ever seen so don't worry, those things won't touch him."

Dan and Emma had seen the kids on brooms before but this was oh so different. It was like comparing a commercial jet aircraft to a Mig fighter, both might fly in the air but there all similarities ended. The Granger parents watched in terror as Harry appeared to fall from the sky before pulling up with a glint of gold escaping from the fingers of his raised clenched fist.

Emma was the first to speak after the applause had died down, "Hermione, I don't think my heart could take watching Harry play Quidditch."

Hermione replied with real feeling. "Believe me mum, I know exactly how you feel."

Dan was now too engrossed with watching the girls pass a rugby ball to each other with a speed, skill and precision that took his breath away. If this was just the chaser drills, he couldn't wait to see a real match. Dan's first love was football but it would be a number of years before he could go to an English match and not know the score before kickoff, here was a sport Dan could really get into.

Dobby had continued the camping theme for dinner, massive cauldrons filled with delicious soups and stews suspended over camp fires were all around the camp. The little elf could have used the same stasis charms he had placed on the breads, fruit, vegetables and many deserts he had laid out on a long table but thought this fitted the camping theme better. Even Minerva enjoyed waiting in line to fill her plate with this wonderful food, the climate and company making it taste even better.

Ted soon had the big screen assembled outside, he may have a muggle background but was a wizard after all, while Dan set up the projector. Ted had also been a great help in choosing what films to show and they decided to make movie nights part educational as well as entertaining. They were starting the whole movie experience with some real classics, Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. The films would be progressively more up to date until they were ready to proceed to a cinema and experience the latest offerings. Loud laughter rolled over the camp as these masters of comedy enthralled a totally new audience. Minerva McGonagall had something else worth adding to her list of things she wanted to introduce to Hogwarts, just as soon as she stopped shaking and the tears of laughter allowed her to write again. Dan hadn't the heart to tell her that all these films were at least half a century old. He was really looking forward to seeing their faces when they watched one of his favourite movies. In Dan's opinion, there was no better way to let

your Christmas dinner digest than by sitting down for a few hours with your family and watching the Wizard of Oz.

-oOoOo-

The cruise ship had also reached Oz but this had unleashed a new set of problems for the Dursleys. Petunia currently couldn't take her eyes off the new gown she'd bought, she'd also been sweating buckets while she'd waited for the credit card transaction to clear. They had begun to max out their cards but it was imperative she had something new to wear for the Christmas Eve Ball held on board the ship. Their new friends still suspected nothing and they needed to keep it that way, a new ball gown became a necessity. Dudley would just have to survive with fewer presents this Christmas, Marge could deal with the fall-out back in Britain.

A knock on their cabin door had Vernon moving to answer. They suspected it was some of their friends but they were very wrong. In the doorway stood the ship's chief purser, accompanied by two uniformed Australian police officers.

The trio entered their cabin before the chief purser spoke. "Mr and Mrs Dursley, if that is your real names, your little scheme has been discovered."

At the back of his mind, Vernon had been wondering when the kick in the stones would be administered. Things had been going a shade too well for the Dursleys and the usual downturn had been overdue. Petunia though was clueless and wondering why the police were here. "Excuse me sir, there seems to be some mistake here."

It was one of the policemen who answered, "Yes, and you made it. One thing we Australian's hate is con artists. Did you really think you could get away with it?"

While Vernon felt the feeling of dread begin to overtake his body, Petunia answered in all honesty. "I'm sorry but I have no idea what you're talking about. We won this cruise fairly and squarely."

It was the chief purser who answered. "We never disclose the circumstances that led to our guests being on board, it's entirely up to them if they wish to share it with the other passengers. You took that to the most extreme case it has been my misfortune to witness. It has come to our notice that the company you supposedly won your holiday from is nothing more than an elaborate hoax. Perpetrated no doubt by yourselves."

Vernon was now half expecting something like this to be the case since the police were involved but Petunia exploded with righteous indignation. "Why the hell would we want to do something like that?"

The other policeman now looked at the couple in disbelief, "You expect us to believe someone went to all this trouble to play a prank on you? If you weren't in on this then someone must really have it in for you two."

Vernon and Petunia shared a quick glance, they instantly suspected the freaks were behind this. If that little girl could turn their table into a living, moving pig, forging a few documents should be child's play.

It was the chief purser who informed them just how deeply in the shit they were. "This cruise package for this grade of cabin costs thirty thousand pounds."

Vernon knew at once they were screwed, no wonder their friends had money to splash about if they could afford to spend that on a holiday. Their annual trip to Brighton hadn't really prepared them for this experience.

There was worse to come, "While all food is included in that price, drinks from our bars isn't. Your bogus holiday scam had your bar bill covered and you have been very generous in ordering drinks for your friends. Since we left Southampton, you have managed to amass a bill of over ten thousand pounds." This figure surprised everyone in the room. Both policemen knew they couldn't afford something like this cabin, far less being able to spend ten grand at the bar. It began to look as if these two here couldn't afford it either and had scammed their way onto the ship. They would be experiencing a severe downgrading in accommodation and catering very shortly.

The chief purser continued. "It was only the size of the bar bill that led to us performing further checks which uncovered the fraud. Had you just quietly went about your business, you would probably have pulled it off." After giving this a few seconds to sink in, he had to cover himself in the very slight chance they had made a mistake here. "If you can pay the forty thousand pounds you now owe us, these gentlemen can leave and no one aboard ship need be made any the wiser. If not, the company will press charges of fraud and these gentlemen here will arrest you."

Neither the purser nor the police had any doubt to where this pair would be spending Christmas. Petunia was desperately searching through her folder for the documents from the company they won the holiday from. Unfortunately, it was now full of illustrated menus telling her where to get the best kebab's in Little Whinning. Vernon knew they were done for, he couldn't pay a tenth of that at the moment. A police conviction for fraud would cost him his job, the house would have to be sold anyway to pay off their debt to the cruise company and their credit card bills. Anything left over from the house sale would disappear into the hands of the lawyers. Vernon so wanted to rant and rave he could almost taste it but these weren't British police, their Australian counterparts had guns instead of truncheons. His only wish now was to avoid significant jail time.

The Dursleys were led off the ship in handcuffs as all their new friends watched. When several of the ladies raced back to their own cabins, loudly proclaiming they were going to ensure none of their jewellery was missing since the Dursleys had been in there, Petunia began to cry.

These were not the kind of memories she had hoped to brag about at her bridge club. Then again, with the house gone, so would her club be. It would probably be a council estate for them now and she doubted many of them played bridge. A stay in jail would soon help Petunia Dursley set her priorities right, there were more important things in life she should have been worrying about. Both Dursleys were so lost in their own thoughts they never even noticed the small press contingent that was waiting at the bottom of the gangway. The photographer's flash added another level to their pain.

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Christmas Eve had been a massive shopping trip that included lunch and dinner, Minerva had to buy more stationary as her list of things that needed changed at Hogwarts grew with her experiences. How she was going to explain pizza to the castle elves was just one of the challenges facing her when they returned to Scotland. It was a weary but happy bunch of shoppers who returned in the Toyotas to the camp. Dobby had gallons of delicious hot chocolate waiting on them, and they were soon revived and ready for the tree trimming competition.

Sirius had found a really spectacular star, the sequence of its glittering coloured lights made it appear almost organic. That it played Christmas Carols when someone walked passed was an added bonus to the marauder. The winning hut would have the star displayed on their outer wall, proclaiming their superior tree trimming skills to the entire camp. With Xeno and Minerva acting as the judges, dressed as Mr and Mrs Claus of course, the tiredness was soon shed as the fun continued.

Sitting around camp fires, toasting marshmallows while singing Christmas carols might have seemed a bit strange. After the experiences they'd had since leaving Hogwarts, even McGonagall, still dressed as Mrs Clause, conducting 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing' with her toasting fork didn't rate a mention.

Harry had a surprise planned for his fiends tomorrow before dad showed the big movie, he would wait until after dinner to reveal it. Dan was also delighted with how well things were going. With Boxing Day being all about the double wedding, the kids were then going to spend the following day on the pirate ship. This should give the newly married couples the house to themselves for the day. Emma was beside him with her head on his shoulder, as the first few bars of 'Silent Night' came from one of the young auror's guitar, both looked toward their children. Seeing them sitting there, safe, happy and surrounded by their friends was all a parent could ever wish for. Who knew what the future would bring, the other magical timeline was so altered as to be useless as a guide from now on. They could only

enjoy what they had and face anything that came their way as a family. 'Silent Night, Holy Night, All is calm, All is bright.' As they sang the words, Dan was left wondering 'but for how much longer?'

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Dumbledore had spent hours staring at the clock before deciding it was time for action. Not knowing what part of Australia they were in meant his local time of arrival calculations were always going to be at best a guess. He used his wand to activate the portkey and could feel it struggling to overcome what must be very powerful wards. His elation spiked as it forced its way through and he vanished, Albus Dumbledore had left the building!

A/N thanks for reading.

The Final Chapter – Part 2

Harry sat amongst the large group in camp and had to concede he was right, his first Christmas in Australia was easily the best one of his life. It had nothing to do with gifts and everything about spending it with his family and friends. Hermione had privately jokingly hinted that she might get him a planner for Christmas, he was surprised however when she handed him an Australian newspaper carefully opened at a specific page. His green eyes flew wide open at the sight waiting on him there, his aunt and uncle were in Australia?

Both were clearly wearing handcuffs and accompanied by two rather large Australian policemen, it looked like the Dursleys may be staying in Australia for a while. The story proclaimed the British fraudsters had been living the high life while Vernon passed himself off as a prominent businessman from a well-to-do family. Their background has since been checked and it can now be revealed the husband is a mere salesman for a drill manufacturing company while the wife stays at home in their little box-like house in Surry.

The article went to great lengths painting them as stupid Poms who had a good thing going, claiming they won the cruise in a competition. The punch line was that they blew their own scam by trying to convince everyone they were high rollers and the entire house of cards came tumbling down. The reporter hoped they would enjoy their new accommodation and once more highlighted their stupidity, claiming a ten thousand pound bar bill was something even an Australian would struggle to match.

Harry looked deeply into his wife's eyes and she stared right back at him, answering his unasked question. "I gave them a chance Harry, that's more than they ever gave you. They could have sat back and enjoyed the holiday of a lifetime but no, that's not the Dursley way. They have such an inbuilt need to feel superior to others that they treated you like a servant and locked you in a cupboard for ten years. You can just picture them, sitting at the captain's table and showing off by ordering champagne for everyone from the waiters. Their greed triggered the spells to change all the documents back to their original forms. This year you won't be sitting looking through the cupboard door slats watching them eat the Christmas dinner you helped cook,

they'll be the ones behind bars. Meanwhile, we'll be enjoying a wonderful meal with our family and friends!" The tears were beginning to make their way down Hermione's cheeks now as her emotions were running high. "No one locks my love in a cupboard and gets away with it, they deserve this and more. I hit their pride and finances, I really wanted to see them thrown overboard in the middle of the Pacific but I can live with this result."

He could sense she was worried about his reaction so Harry wrapped his wife in his arms, he'd put the Dursleys completely out of his mind but Hermione clearly hadn't forgotten about them. He kissed her cheek and used this closeness to whisper in her ear. "Thank you love, that was a marauder worthy prank. Can I assume that article will appear in every paper in Surry?"

Hermione held him tight and just gave a slight nod, she had been so afraid Harry would be angry with her. She felt his breath as he once more whispered in her ear, "If you're satisfied with the outcome then that wipes the slate clean. All that's left now is the happy ever after bit, as long as you're with me it will be!"

All around them, the camp occupants were reaffirming their opinion that you never piss off a Potter. All had heard snippets about Harry's life before coming to Hogwarts, there was no sympathy for the Dursleys in this group. It was the twins though who put the camp's feelings into words, in their own inimitable fashion of course.

"Hey guys, you going soft in your old age?"

"Yeah, wasn't there a handy tower you could dangle them from?"

"Aw George, that's not fair. They're not even teenagers yet and you would have them settling into a rut already. These two are more imaginative than that."

"Naw Fred, I'm still mad that Draco was cut down before I got to see him dangle, I don't want to miss the next one."

It was Harry who answered, "Well George, if we were still at Hogwarts I could do my best to arrange you getting a bird's eye view of the next one. That is if you really want to?"

George actually fell off the bench he'd been sitting on in his haste to assure Harry that was not necessary. This was met with roars of laughter, especially from those who the twins had played pranks upon.

The laughter was broken by Andi, "Oh Dear, with all the excitement of the wedding I forgot all about Draco. Guess I won't be meeting him during the holidays after all." This was the last time his name was mentioned as everyone went back to enjoying themselves, even Pansy never thought about the blond Slytherin again for the rest of the holiday.

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Draco was currently lying in bed, unable to sleep. This was hardly an unusual occurrence for youngsters the world over as Christmas beckoned. What was unusual though is that it wasn't excitement that was keeping the boy awake, Draco No-Name had simply nothing to get excited about. The Australian buzz in Hogwarts had only been overshadowed once in the last few weeks, straight after Professor Lupin had announced he was going to marry the pink haired auror. That this auror was the daughter of the woman he was looking forward to meeting over the holidays almost certainly meant Draco was heading for another disappointment.

If the Potters had arranged for all their friends to be in Australia, it was a given that the parents of the bride were going to be flown out there too. With Sirius Black also getting married, the chances of Draco being accepted into any of those families was dwindling fast. There would probably be little Blacks and Lupins running around soon. Andromeda Tonks would then be a grandmother and an aunt, she wouldn't want him hanging around as a reminder that both her sisters were staying in Azkaban.

Anyway Draco figured it, he could see no other future for himself but the orphanage. With no name, family, bloodline or gold, he was all

out of options. That was enough to stop anyone sleeping and seriously diminished his Christmas spirit.

-oOoOo-

Albus was ecstatic, right in front of him were the trunks he had the foresight to place tracking charms on way back in the school term. His portkey had been worth all that effort, it had done its job exactly as it was designed to. The trunks sitting squarely at the bottom of the four-poster beds tripped some internal alarms for Albus and, as his elation started to fade, he soon began to realise what was so very wrong with this scene. The trunks were exactly where they had been when he placed the tracking charms on them, sitting at the bottom of the children's beds in their Gryffindor dormitory. How could this be? He was supposed to be in Australia, not Scotland. How could they possibly go on holiday without taking their trunks?

His special portkey was only charged for a one way trip and Albus knew better than most he needed to get outside the wards before he could escape by apparition. He badly needed time to figure out how his plan had been foiled. Since Albus was no longer the current headmaster of Hogwarts, the castle wouldn't allow portkeys made by him to pass through the wards. Another special portkey was also out of the question, he had neither the time nor the energy required to create one.

Albus was also aware that his unauthorised entry through the wards would have triggered an alarm with whoever had been left in charge of the school, the portraits, ghosts and house elves could already be looking for him. Albus needed to get out of here but, as he passed through the portrait hole, he was reluctant to leave the castle. Fleeing Hogwarts with his tail between his legs undeniably alluded to him being wrong about something, his deteriorating mental condition refused to accept that as a viable outcome.

He began to wander aimlessly around the castle corridors, trying to avoid being detected while attempting to solve the problem of why those trunks weren't in Australia. Noticing the corridor he was currently passing through had no portraits, just a tapestry with some wizard trying to teach trolls to dance, Albus decided to stay around

here for now. He wished his problem was as easy to solve as the wizard's in the tapestry. Compared to discovering how people could travel half way around the world and leave their trunks at home, teaching trolls to tours en l'air would be a doddle! Albus walked up and down this somewhat safe corridor as he considered the mess he was in, all his mind could concentrate on though was his need to kill Harry Potter.

Albus must have been really distracted, he'd walked up and down here at least three times and never noticed the large oak door. On opening it, the answer to his problem became glaringly obvious. The trunks weren't in Australia because their owners weren't in Australia. Voldemort had faked his own death to disguise his possession of Harry Potter, a fake holiday would be easy to contrive compared to that. The reason for Dumbledore's absolute certainty for a seemingly unlikely conclusion was right in front of him, namely one Harry James Potter.

The room he now cautiously entered was enormous and appeared to be constructed from great slabs of granite. About twenty meters in front of Albus was a circular raised platform. Sitting exactly in the centre of this platform was a chair that more resembled a throne, it was currently occupied by a frowning Harry Potter.

"Hello old man, I should have known you would be the one to figure this out."

Albus couldn't contain his grin, "Hello Tom."

The boy's eyes flashed red as he growled, "Don't call me by that disgusting name, I am Lord Voldemort."

This confirmed all Dumbledore's suspicions, an admission straight from the boy's mouth. "I know Tom and that is why it must end it here today."

At hearing that hated name again, the boy sprang to his feet. Harry's wand was out and a green beam was heading toward Albus before he had time to blink, far less react. Only Fawkes flashing to his aid and swallowing the killing curse saved the old wizard's life. Albus

didn't have time to scoop his brave, now small featherless friend up at the moment, he was too busy trying to stay alive.

Tom was relentless as curse upon curse rained down on Albus, each one darker and more powerful than the last. Albus was calling on all his experience and power yet still barely holding his own against the boy. The room being constructed from granite blocks was probably the only reason it was still standing instead of coming crashing down on them from the amount of magic on display, even the air they breathed appeared magically charged as the two most powerful wizards in the country fought for their lives. The throne that had been present when Albus first entered the room was now reduced to nothing more than kindling and ash. As the battle raged on, it soon became clear that Tom had the upper hand. Albus had a few close brushes with death and began to fear he had bitten off more than he could chew. It appeared Voldemort wasn't going to settle for just killing Albus, he wanted to prove once and for all who the greatest wizard in the world was by slowly taking Dumbledore apart. Tom Riddle though was becoming overconfident.

Albus was currently struggling to defend himself against a large dragon that appeared to be constructed from fiendfyre while Tom's laughter reverberated off the now heavily scorched and scarred walls.

"You've finally met your match old man. Even in this child's body, Lord Voldemort is far too powerful for you."

As Albus dodged the dragon's fiery tail, he was forced to concede Tom was right about one thing. After draining his power to make that bloody portkey, the boy was indeed more powerful than he was. The now exhausted old wizard noticed something else though, while Tom was taking the time to taunt him, Riddle's guard was down for a moment. Understanding this might be the only chance he would be offered, Albus used his flame whip spell. A coil of brilliant white light shot out the end of his wand and sliced through the dragon's wing before, with a flick of the wrist from Albus, it abruptly changed direction and caught Harry neatly on the shoulder.

Voldemort's right arm came off so quickly and cleanly, his wand was still clutched in his dismembered hand when it smacked the stone

floor. With the breaking of the spell, Voldemort's flaming dragon disappeared in a puff of smoke and left behind a one armed eleven-year-old boy sitting whimpering in pain on the edge of the raised platform.

The green eyes were beseeching Albus as he walked toward the wounded boy. "Professor Dumbledore, you did it sir! You banished Voldemort for good. He's gone sir, there's only me, Harry, in here now."

Dumbledore's eyes had their twinkle back again. "Nice try Tom, but that is exactly what I would expect you to attempt. For the greater good of the entire world, this time you have to die for real."

The boy's eyes flashed red once more, "Curse you Dumbledore, I told you never to call me by that name again. I killed all the Riddles before I left Hogwarts as a student."

"You're wrong Tom, there's one left and the sad duty of ending that line falls to me. Goodbye Tom Riddle."

"No sir! Wait, it really is me. Surely you wouldn't kill a defenceless boy? You have to believe me..."

The green light that hit the young body silenced the begging and ended the reign of terror that Lord Voldemort had not only instigated but orchestrated with such deadly efficiency. It also killed the body that once belonged to young Harry James Potter and for that Albus was truly sorry. He could only hope that if he met James and Lily on his next great adventure, they could find it in their hearts to forgive him.

He recovered the now baby Fawkes from the ashes that the killing curse had buried him under, with his friend nestled safely in his pocket Albus left the room without a backward glance at the child's lifeless body. He got less than half-way down the corridor though before an expelliarmus hit him squarely in the chest and robbed him of his wand. The old wizard was exhausted with nothing really left to fight for, Albus offered no resistance and just let it happen. Amelia Bones and a dozen aurors now had their wands trained on him from

both ends of the corridor, there was nowhere for him to go and nothing left for him to do anyway.

"I'll come quietly Amelia, it's finally over. The dark lord possessed Harry Potter but I managed to defeat him. I'm sorrier than I can say that there was no way to save the boy, for the greater good he had to die. You'll find the body behind that door."

Amelia wasn't alone in feeling an icy shiver of fear run down her spine at those words. The only reason the old fool was still standing there and not already blasted into little pieces was the glaring misconceptions in his statement. Having given permission for Susan to spend the holidays with the Potters and arranged the auror escort for the entire party, Amelia was certain Lord Potter wasn't within ten thousand miles of Hogwarts. There was also the fact that where Dumbledore indicated the boy's body lay contained nothing but a solid stone wall without a door anywhere in sight.

His next statement settled her nerves and destroyed the doubts anyone had, especially when Dumbledore held out his clearly empty hands. "Amelia, could I impose on you to take care of Fawkes? Just until he grows strong enough to look after himself once more, he's been a faithful friend and I would be most grateful to you."

Amelia made a great pretence of carefully taking the nonexistent phoenix from the old wizard. She was sure her entire team were sharing the same type of thoughts as their boss, Albus Dumbledore was as crazy as a shithouse rat!

The head of the DMLE was a pro though, as six of her aurors were dispatched to escort the disarmed Dumbledore straight into a heavily guarded holding cell at the ministry, the other six were scouring the castle for any sign of a body. Amelia was certain they wouldn't find Lord Potter's body inside Hogwarts, just as she was certain Dumbledore's future would be spent in a secure room at St Mungo's that had extensive use of cushioning charms on the walls and floor.

-oOoOo-

Among other things, Harry and Hermione had received bright red quad bikes for Christmas. These had seating for two and came with the extra crash helmets needed for their passengers. The rest of the morning was then spent zooming up and down the beach, giving their friends rides until they felt confident enough to have a go themselves. Neville took to it like a duck to water, Millie snuggled behind him with her arms wrapped around his chest might have helped slightly. Oliver was not one to miss an opportunity and was soon repeating this feat with Penelope hanging on for dear life behind him. Luna though was downright scary at the controls and seemed to instinctively push the machine to its limits, only Harry and Hermione were brave enough to climb on behind her.

The camp now had a table resembling one of those from the Hogwarts great hall in place of the picnic benches. It was currently straining under the weight of the food dobby had placed on it. Harry was mesmerized by the size of the turkeys, they were so large Harry began to fear that the local emu population might be missing a few of its number. Crackers were being pulled, silly hats were being worn before Harry stopped speaking mid-sentence and pulled something out the bag that was by his side.

"Oh no, I forgot they were in a different time zone. Ginny, this is for you!"

-oOoOo-

Arthur had all Ginny's photographs spread before him, he'd been staring at them for hours like a starving man sat down to a feast. His eyes just didn't know where they should be looking as the pictures were all so good. It wasn't the muggleness of them that fascinated Arthur, Ginny's smiling face beaming out from every single one was a sight his tired old eyes couldn't get enough of. He was forced from his musings by an owl delivering a small parcel addressed to him, a quick round of headshakes told Arthur that neither his wife nor two eldest sons knew anything about it.

It was a mirror and the note attached simply said 'speak your daughter's name'. Arthur shrugged and gave it a go, "Ronnie? Ronda? Ginny?" On saying Ginny, the mirror went black but he could

hear muffled voices. It was about twenty seconds later when the other one was clearly being unwrapped that Arthur saw the surprised face of his youngest daughter appear in front of him.

"Dad? Oh this is wonderful, Merry Christmas!"

Arthur had the beginning of tears in his eyes as his daughters face was replaced by those of Fred and George while the rest of the Weasleys crowded around the mirror Arthur was holding to see what was happening.

"Hey everyone, Merry Christmas."

"Yeah, same from me. Gin will be back in a moment, she's currently in floods of tears and hugging Harry and Hermione."

Fred noticed there was someone missing but didn't want to alert everyone at the Australian end to something they considered Weasley family business. "Where's Ronnie?"

Molly was also in tears at being able to talk with her children on Christmas Day, she was still aware enough though not to let anything slip. "The potions Ronnie has to take mean there are good days and bad days, we're just unfortunate this is a bad day. I'll pass on your good wishes."

It was Bill who asked the next question, "What in the name of Merlin are these things?"

George had a wide grin on his face, "I think the only words to describe them are bloody amazing. Harry's father and his friends invented them though he and Hermione have been working to improve them."

Fred was nodding his head in agreement, "Harry just gave Ginny one as part of her Christmas present, they must have sent you its partner."

The twins were elbowed out the mirror as Ginny had now returned, "Hey everyone, I see Charlie is there, did you like my pictures dad?"

Arthur's tears escaped to streak down his face at the thoughtfulness of the young couple who had made talking to his daughter possible. "I love the pictures Ginny and you seem to be enjoying yourself. You're smiling in every single picture, I've never seen you look so happy."

"Oh dad, it's been wonderful, even with the twins here!" This led to some shouts of indignation and laughter from around her. "We've got a double wedding to look forward to tomorrow and then the next day we're spending aboard a pirate ship and looking for dolphins out on the ocean." Someone said something to her and Ginny nodded in agreement. "Dad, I've got to go but we can call each other anytime now. We're actually sitting eating Christmas dinner in the sunshine at the moment, Harry forgot you were two hours ahead of Britain when he sent these out. Have a Merry Christmas and we'll talk to you later today."

As Ginny's image faded from the mirror, Arthur's gaze returned to those wonderful photographs. Lord and Lady Potter had done so much for Ginny and now the twins were with her for the holidays, it was a mystery to Arthur how Ronnie could have taken such a dislike to the young couple. One thing was for certain, not a word would be spoken against the Potters while he was head of house Weasley. Thankfully his wife appeared to have finally got that message.

-oOoOo-

With Harry's surprise now blown, he handed out the rest of the mirrors though warned everyone not to activate them. The mirrors vibrated when called and they might scare the owls who would currently be delivering them, they would survive being dropped but a lost mirror might as well be a broken mirror. The sun was going down as the screen was going up when the mirrors began to go off.

Luna was of course sitting next to Harry with her father on her other side, Harry put his arm around her shoulders. "You didn't get a mirror today because your father is sitting next to you, there will be one waiting for you Luna before you leave. Trust me when I say we will be keeping in touch with you. You're our best friend and we don't want you to forget that..."

Harry was interrupted by Susan, "Harry, my aunt really needs to speak with you. She says it's very, very urgent."

Harry took the offered mirror to see the monocle wearing head of the DMLE smiling at him. "Lord Potter I'm extremely relieved to see you're not only alive but looking very healthy."

Harry hadn't noticed that all conversation around the camp had died as everyone struggled to listen in to this conversation. Hermione was on his other side and was currently signalling for her dad to leave the projector and get his backside over here. "Madam Bones, you have me at a disadvantage. I have no idea what you are talking about."

Amelia took a deep breath before beginning, "Last night, Albus Dumbledore broke into Hogwarts. We apprehended him in a corridor where he claimed to have just defeated you in a battle to the death. He indicated your body was in a room behind him but none of us could find it. While certain he was mistaken, it's still a relief to have it confirmed by speaking with you."

Hermione was first to see the possibilities and asked the appropriate question, "Madam Bones, did you catch Dumbledore on the seventh floor? Beside a particularly ugly tapestry of dancing trolls?"

Amelia Bones was shocked, something that was not easily done. "Lady Potter, how could you possibly know that?"

The two Potters were running the possible scenario through their heads, unfortunately they were talking out loud at the same time.

"The room would show him exactly what he wanted to see."

"An epic battle with him as the victor."

"All his ideas proven right."

"The name of Albus Dumbledore once more revered."

The Weasley twins once more broke the resulting awkward silence, "Do you ever get the feeling we've been superseded Fred?"

"George, we've been outclassed since the minute those two walked into Hogwarts."

Remus joined the conversation, "Don't take it to heart boys, we thought our group was pretty hot and I don't know anything about this mysterious room either. How the hell did you two discover in a matter of weeks something the marauders didn't in seven years?"

Harry realised everyone in their Australian party was now waiting on an answer as much as Madam Bones was back in Britain. "Well Moony, perhaps if you'd let my mum join you guys, you might have fond it. Apart from my brilliant wife's assistance, we also had a rather pressing incentive for scouring the castle for its secrets. We were searching for Voldemort's horcruxes, we discovered he'd hidden Ravenclaw's diadem in what's known as the room of requirements."

Hermione took over seamlessly, "The room of requirements becomes whatever you need it to be, the diadem was hidden in a massive store room with century's worth of junk cluttering almost every inch of it. It can just as easily become an exact copy of your bedroom back home if that's what you want."

Harry nodded in agreement with his wife, "If Dumbledore entered there thinking that he needed to kill me, then the room would accommodate him. He will really believe he killed me but why was he in Hogwarts in the first place?"

Amelia had the answer to that, "He'd placed tracking charms on your Gryffindor friends' trunks, had you not provided them with holdalls for travelling they would have led Dumbledore right to your home."

Harry smiled and winked conspiratorially toward Luna, knowing that was their friend's biggest fear. "Madam Bones, no one takes heavy trunks as luggage on an airplane but the protections around this house would cancel any tracking charms the instant they passed through the wards. There is also a very good reason we travel everywhere by car. In the extremely unlikely event that someone

managed to get a fix on this position, our wards redirect attempted portkeys or apparition to the most shark infested bit of ocean the goblins could find. The goblins informed me that should anyone be unfortunate enough to splash down in that spot, their chances of dying from drowning are practically nonexistent."

Dan's face appeared between those of his children, "Excuse me for butting-in Madam Bones but I'm more interested in what happened to Dumbledore?"

"After Dumbledore told his story, he asked me to take care of phoenix that only he could see. We have him locked in a secure room at St Mungo's and he'll never leave it again, our healers have already diagnosed his mental state as poor and degenerating rapidly. In layman's terms, he's nuttier than a fruitcake! We have him isolated and the healers have convinced him to write down his memoirs so our society will forever know how great Albus Dumbledore actually was. He's happily writing away to preserve his image for posterity, Cornelius has only read the beginning and already wants to see the crazy old coot introduced to a dementor for some of the things he's done."

Dan wanted to make sure there were no mistakes, "I want to be sure we understand each other here Madam Bones, Dumbledore will never be a threat to my children again?"

Amelia nodded, "He's locked in a secure room and will be there until he dies. Our healers speculated that he had been ill for a while but there had been a severe acceleration of his condition recently. Based on their estimates, we reckon he'll not remember his own name, far less Hogwarts by September next year. It is now safe for your children to return to Hogwarts if they wish to do so. I would ask that you keep his worsening mental state quiet for now, we want to get as much information out of him as possible without this situation being blazed all over the Prophet."

Harry could only shake his head, "I'm sorry Madam Bones but I don't think that's going to happen, everyone here heard every word we've said and most of them had their mirrors open as they were speaking to their family back in Britain when you called. I'll hand you back to

Susan now as Hermione and me need to go speak with our parents and Sirius, thanks for letting us know so quickly."

Harry handed the mirror back to Susan as he and Hermione led Dan, Emma and Sirius back into the house, everyone left outside was very interested in the outcome of that talk.

Charity was sitting next to her headmistress, "How are you feeling Minerva? I know you've been close to Albus for many years."

Minerva analysed her feelings carefully before answering, "I'm feeling mostly relief, relief that he's been caught before he could do any harm and actually relief that he's ill. The thought of him being sane and doing the things he did would mean he'd conned us all for many years."

Charity understood immediately, "Yes, we can at least remember the good things he did before he was ill. Minerva, we need to talk to the Potters about this room. If it can do what the Potters claim, just think what it could achieve for muggle studies! We could introduce our students to a muggle environment with total control over the situation and no financial cost to Hogwarts. I know we both want to continue the trips but, without the Potters financing them, we are going to have to settle for what Hogwarts can afford. This room could give us unlimited possibilities."

The thought of her students being able to go muggle shopping or watch these wonderful films without leaving Hogwarts had the headmistresses' eyes sparkling. Her list just grew greatly in length, top of that list though was talk to the Potters.

They had been gone for less than ten minutes but already Luna was finding it difficult to remain sitting, she'd become used to having friends and could never go back to the way she was before. Talking through the mirrors was ok to keep in touch but that was the one thing they lacked, touch! A mirror couldn't put its arm around you if you needed a hug, Luna hadn't had this many hugs since her mother died and dreaded the thought of not seeing Harry and Hermione until the summer. Being here with everyone and her father was wonderful,

flying back to Britain without the Potters and Grangers would break her heart.

The five walked back out, their faces giving nothing away, it was Harry who spoke. "Headmistress McGonagall, is our old room still available?"

Luna was like a champagne cork leaving the bottle as she shot straight into both Potters arms, this was also the signal for the celebrations to begin. Not one person heard if McGonagall answered Harry, they were all too busy cheering, whistling and shouting. Oliver had Penelope hoisted up in the air as if practicing for raising the house Quiddich cup that would soon be clad in Gryffindor colours. Neville and Millie were dancing for joy on top of the table, now thankfully free of food.

Dan could tell there would be no movie watched tonight, these kids were more interested in the wonderful wizard and witch who would be leaving Oz and flying back to Britain with them. They were in the mood for a party tonight. Their family discussion inside the house didn't really amount to much, both Harry and Hermione were desperate to return with their friends. Most of their time had been spent wondering if they could celebrate with a glass of champagne for everyone, Emma had been the hardest to convince but had finally conceded that one glass wouldn't do the children any harm. Dobby made sure everyone had a glass as Dan proposed a toast, 'There's no place like home' was something they could all agree on. With singing and dancing soon taking place as the party got into top gear, the general opinion was that Oz was a pretty cool place to be too.

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Harry stood beside a nervous Sirius and Remus while three beautiful girls made their way toward them. The Double wedding was being held outdoors with Minerva, Andi, Carol and Emma all having their hankies out already. The three mothers had worked tirelessly to ensure everything went perfectly today, no detail was too small and that included the rose petal covered aisle the two brides-to-be were currently making their way down. Tonks and Hestia's dresses sparkled in the natural light, almost outshone by the smiles they and

their proud fathers were wearing. All this was wasted on Harry though, his eyes only saw one person. He'd known his wife was beautiful since another Christmas when she had, in his unbiased opinion, outshone a veela. That night had nothing on today, probably because she was his Hermione now and he was the one waiting on her.

As she walked behind the brides, Harry silently swore Hermione would have her day in the spotlight. Dan would get his chance to walk his only daughter down the aisle, Emma and Hermione would have the opportunity to plan everything to the n'th degree and McGonagall would still be crying tears of joy. By that time their friends would all be so comfortable in the muggle world, they would have no worries about holding the wedding in a church. There might even be a few Blacks and Lupin pups to add to the guest list by then. Harry didn't think he would have any difficulty convincing his wife and family to hold this event on his seventeenth birthday, he could already picture their Devon home decorated for a wedding reception in July.

Harry had no idea what the British wizarding community would be like by then but the sorting hat did say their work had only just begun with the defeat of Voldemort in the last timeline. There were a few certainties he could count on though, Neville would be his best man while Luna would be Hermione's bridesmaid. The biggest certainty of them all was that Hermione would always be by his side, in this world and the next.

A nudge in the ribs by his godfather may have brought him back to the present but nothing was going to wipe the grin off his face today, not even the prospect of making the dreaded best man speeches!

The End

A/N Thanks for Reading